THE Nation.

LET'S BE CLEAR ABOUT OBAMA
Katrina vanden Heuvel

MOTOR-CITY MELTDOWN
John Nichols
Marissa Colón-Margolies

IRAN'S PASSIONATE UPRISINGS
Laura Secor

SEAN PENN
Conversations with Chavez and Castro

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Letters

Goodbye Robocalls?

Amissville, Va.

A little irony arrived with the two issues of *The Nation* I found in my mailbox the Monday after the election. Yep, both the November 17 and 24 issues got here together. 'Course, the ironic part of it is—and I'm *sure* it's only a coincidence—even though my county went red through no fault of my own, even though I live on the totally opposite end of the state from Hampton Roads, here was *The Nation* advising me a week after the fact that I had to get out and vote despite all that Republican hooliganism trying to disenfranchise me.

Oh, ya left out the one about the pile o' radical pinko magazines falling off the truck only to be recovered a week late, er, later. I got one a' them Muslims Are Destroying the World discs, too! Life sure is different out here on the farm! Missin' those friendly ole robocalls.

Mary Ann Dancisin

Full Employment à la Minsky

Los Angeles; Rhinebeck, N.Y.

Our gratitude to Robert Pollin for "We're All Minskyites Now" [Nov. 17], drawing attention to the ongoing relevance to economics of our father, Hyman Minsky. While he is best known as a theorist of financial crises, in Chapter 13 of his *Stabilizing an Unstable Economy*, Minsky delineates a plan for full employment adapted from those implemented by FDR. Our father shows how state-generated full employment can operate to provide greater stability for the entire economy. Indeed, the success of Argentina's post-2001 state-run Employer of Last Resort program (in part conceived by two of our father's closest associates, Jan Kregal and L. Randall Wray) attests to the feasibility of Minsky's proposals as a means to achieve full employment, ameliorate capitalism's tendency to generate severe income inequalities and help stabilize an utterly unstable economy—a strategy we might all do well to keep in mind in the coming months!

Alan Minsky, Diana Minsky

letters@thenation.com

Green New Deal / Climate Bailout

Austin, Tex.

Mark Hertsgaard is one of the few journalists who have warned for years of the existential threat of global warming, and in "Wanted: A Climate Bailout" [Nov. 17] he responsibly urges immediate action to avert the impending disaster, even implying it might already be too late.

We've been reading about global warming for two decades, yet we still not only add greater quantities of CO_2 and other global warming gases to the atmosphere year after year, we're also increasing the rate of increase of those gases year after year. And the much feared threshold of 350 ppm CO_2 has been passed with little concern from our leaders.

The accident of worldwide recession is about the only good news on the global warming front, but every government on earth is doing all it can to avoid recession. Get it? The very basis of modern existence—ever growing industrial production and consumption—causes or dramatically contributes to the global warming virtually every credible scientist says will decimate most higher life-forms on earth. So combating global warming requires rejecting much of the modern Western paradigm, not only entrenched habits of production and consumption but also key elements of the "progressive materialism" undergirding dominant Western ideologies.

But where is that sense of urgency in Van Jones's "Working Together for a Green New Deal" [Nov. 17]? Jones sensibly suggests we focus more on what to fight *for*—resolving economic, ecological and social crises on terms favoring ordinary people—than what to fight against. Well, sure, hard to disagree. But this line would have made more sense in 1982, when arguably there was still time for old-fashioned, gradualist coalition- and movement-building. Alas, it's late in the game for those tactics.

James Hansen, the chief NASA climate scientist Hertsgaard quotes, offers a better sense of what is needed when he suggests

(continued on page 24)

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Stimulus Now

As we go to press, the country is in the midst of one of those disquieting and anxious in-between periods of the economic crisis. The financial system has taken a step back from the brink, but the collapse of Citigroup or UBS would likely push it over, inciting an acute panic. The Big Three automakers may explode, sending shrapnel throughout the economy and putting as many as 3 million people on the unemployment rolls. Then there's the steady stream of bad news we've endured since the subprime losses became clear in August of last year—massive write-downs, bank failures, slowing sales and 1.2 million lost jobs. Most disturbing, the rate of decline in consumer spending and payrolls is increasing.

EDITORIAL

What needs to be done is fairly clear. The dangerous bout of Hooverism that surfaced during the late stages of the election—a call for belt-tightening and balanced budgets—seems, thankfully, to have passed. As Barack Obama said on *60 Minutes*, a broad consensus of economists—from Martin Feldstein on the right to James Galbraith on the left—agree that forestalling a historic economic disaster requires a massive and immediate injection of federal funds into the economy.

The economic team that Obama unveiled November 24—composed chiefly of Clinton retreads, centrist academics and respected technocrats—doesn't inspire tremendous confidence that the incoming administration fully understands the degree to which the old neoliberal model has been discredited. These appointments, especially Larry Summers to head the National Economic Council, and his protégé, Timothy Geithner, as Treasury secretary, should face tough scrutiny from Congress and the press about the role Clinton-era deregulation played in the current crisis (see William Greider, below). But it is the policy, not the personnel, that is most important. The early signs are that the policy is essentially sound. Obama has directed his economic team to put together a major jobs package that would "put people back to work rebuilding our crumbling roads and bridges, modernizing schools that are failing our children and building wind farms and solar panels, fuel-efficient cars and the alternative energy technologies."

That's the good news. The bad news is that the economy is tanking so quickly we can't wait around until January 20, and a lame-duck government has essentially abdicated its role to Ben Bernanke's Fed and Hank Paulson's Treasury. But the Fed's attempts at monetary stimulus have lost almost all traction: long-term interest rates and the Fed funds rate are now moving in opposite directions.

We should expect no leadership from Bush and company at this point. But Congress can take steps now to hold the economy together and to move quickly toward a deeper stimulus package. Congress should reconvene after Thanksgiving to pass an immediate bridge loan for the auto industry and its workers to get them through to January, before debating a more comprehensive rescue package that transforms Detroit into a more viable, innovative, green industry (see Marissa Colón-Margolies, "How to Save Motor City," page 20).

The next Congress convenes a full two weeks before Obama takes the presidential oath, and it is vital that it pass a bold stimulus plan that Obama can sign on day one. The plan must not simply focus on stabilizing the stock market and spurring consumption; it must be oriented toward putting people to work through public investments that rebuild our country's infrastructure and expand the productive capacity of our economy. When the financial sector faced the precipice, Congress was able to hammer through $700 billion in a matter of days. The real economy deserves no less.

Page 25: Stolen kisses in Iran

Inside

2 Letters

Editorials & Comment

3 **Stimulus Now**
4 **Bonfire of the Vanities**
WILLIAM GREIDER
4 **Moving Obama**
KATRINA VANDEN HEUVEL
5 **Noted**
6 **Hands Off the UAW**
JOHN NICHOLS
8 **Don't Repackage Gitmo!**
MICHAEL RATNER AND JULES LOBEL
9 **The Fall of Triumphalism**
MICHAEL T. KLARE

Columns

6 **Deadline Poet**
The Three Bozos of the Apocalypse
CALVIN TRILLIN
10 **The Liberal Media**
Refs, Worked (Redux)
ERIC ALTERMAN

Articles

11 **Conversations With Chávez and Castro**
SEAN PENN
20 **How to Save Motor City**
Letting it fail: catastrophic. Turning it into a lean green-machine-maker: visionary.
MARISSA COLÓN-MARGOLIES
22 **Election's Over—Time to Begin**
How millions of Obama volunteers can go to work for a new progressive agenda.
MICHAEL PERTSCHUK

Books & the Arts

25 **MAHDAVI:** Passionate Uprisings: Iran's Sexual Revolution
LAURA SECOR
29 **SHILLER:** The Subprime Solution
ZANDI: Financial Shock
MAX FRASER
31 **Unconditional Love Song** (POEM)
C.D. WRIGHT
34 **ALPEROVITZ, DALY:** Unjust Deserts: How the Rich Are Taking Our Common Inheritance and Why We Should Take It Back
MARK ENGLER

COVER DESIGN BY GENE CASE & STEPHEN KLING/ AVENGING ANGELS

VOLUME 287, NUMBER 20, DECEMBER 15, 2008
PRINTED NOVEMBER 25

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SUBMISSIONS: Queries only, no manuscripts. Go to www.thenation.com and click on "about," then "submissions" for a query form. Queries may be mailed to The Nation, 33 Irving Place, New York, NY 10003. SASE for poems.

INTERNET: Selections from the current issue become available Thursday night at www.thenation.com.

Printed on 100% recycled 40% post-consumer acid- and chlorine-free paper, in the USA.

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NEWS & ANALYSIS

Citizen Kang: The final episode

William Greider: O's economic team

Peter Rothberg: Young activists

Tom Engelhardt: Custodians of empire

VIDEO NATION

Sean Penn on Chávez and Castro

NATION POLL

Whom will Bush pardon?

RETIRE BUSH!

Enter our contest

Bonfire of the Vanities

A monstrous crisis is bearing down on the president-elect, but it is not just about the sinking economy and Barack Obama's plans to launch a massive economic stimulus. The house that's on fire is the financial system and the government's failing efforts to save Wall Street's largest banks. Bloomberg News reports this explosive fact: the Fed and Treasury have so far obligated taxpayers to cover a staggering $7.7 trillion in potential losses. That is roughly equal to half the nation's annual economic activity, yet Washington officials continue to treat those bankers like their privileged clients.

COMMENT

Some of the Fed's efforts are no doubt worthy, but the largest deals to rescue Wall Street firms, like the monster bailout for Citigroup, have already taken on a stench of self-dealing—protecting club members from their self-inflicted wounds and demanding little in return for the public. Bloomberg and others have sued the Fed, demanding that it identify the recipients of its lending and the rotten assets the Fed has taken on its balance sheet as collateral. Fed chair Ben Bernanke imperiously replied that such transparency would be "counterproductive."

He's right to worry. Public wrath will swell when people learn the particulars of the extremely generous deal-making with Wall Street. If he's not careful, Obama will be on the receiving end of the blame. He should seriously consider withdrawing his nomination of Timothy Geithner, president of the New York Federal Reserve Bank, to be Treasury secretary. Geithner is the badly soiled negotiator who worked out some of the most dubious deals. His easy terms protected shareholders and executives but demanded almost nothing from the failing banks for the public. Worst of all, the deals did not work. They have failed to stabilize much of anything and are still putting Wall Street preservation ahead of the national interest. Where is the evidence that we can expect a different approach if Geithner is in charge? Or even that he understands the true dimensions of this crisis? Obama had better get answers up front, or else he might wind up as history's fall guy. WILLIAM GREIDER

Moving Obama

There are some heated conversations under way in the progressive blogosphere, including some at thenation.com, in which our own writers as well as people like Glenn Greenwald, Jane Hamsher, David Sirota and Digby are debating why Barack Obama has so far appointed few progressives to his cabinet. It's worth checking them out.

I think that we progressives need to be as clear-eyed, tough and pragmatic about Obama as he is about us.

President-elect Obama is a centrist at a time when centrism means energy independence and green jobs and universal healthcare and massive economic stimulus programs and government intervention in the economy. He is a pragmatist at a moment when pragmatism and the scale of our financial crisis compel him to adopt bold policies. He is a cautious leader at a time when, to paraphrase *New York Times* columnist Paul Krug-

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Noted.

RECOUNT REDUX: The slow recount in the Minnesota Senate contest has proceeded with relative grace, in stark contrast to the 2000 *Bush v. Gore* debacle in Florida. Republican Senator **Norm Coleman**'s ridiculous suggestion that Democratic challenger **Al Franken** concede one of the closest Senate races in history was dismissed by every serious observer—for good reason, as it turns out. The reconciliation of preliminary counts and the manual recounting of 2.9 million ballots has narrowed Coleman's lead from more than 700 votes to around 170—with thousands of ballots yet to be reviewed.

Much credit for the smooth functioning of the recount goes to Minnesota Secretary of State **Mark Ritchie**, a reformer elected in 2006 on a promise to promote high voter turnout and election integrity. Ritchie, a member of Franken's Democratic-Farmer-Labor Party, has been attacked by TV ranters such as **Bill O'Reilly** and **Sean Hannity** as part of a national conservative strategy to discredit the recount. But in Minnesota he's earning high marks. The **Minneapolis Star-Tribune**, which backed Coleman, editorialized, "Despite a fog of innuendo and misinformation, every preliminary step taken to date by this state's election administrators appears sound. Secretary of State Mark Ritchie deserves a nod of confidence from this state as the recount begins." The **Bemidji Pioneer** was blunter. After Coleman backers attacked Ritchie, the newspaper editorialized, "These folks just need to button their lips and let the recount officials do their jobs." JOHN NICHOLS

CITIZEN JONES: Environmental activist, author and social entrepreneur **Van Jones** is the 2008 recipient of the $100,000 **Puffin/Nation Prize for Creative Citizenship**. A champion for the toughest urban constituencies and causes, Jones is the founder and president of **Green For All**, a national advocacy organization based in Oakland, California, committed to building an inclusive, green economy to lift millions of people out of poverty. He is also the author of the *New York Times* bestseller **The Green Collar Economy** (Harper One), an adaptation of which was the cover story of the November 17 issue of *The Nation*. Jones will receive the award at **The Nation Institute**'s Annual Dinner Gala in New York City on December 8.

In 2007 Jones helped the city of Oakland pass a Green Jobs Corps proposal, which allocated funds to train residents in eco-friendly "green-collar" jobs. Last year he worked successfully with House Speaker **Nancy Pelosi** and Representatives **Hilda Solis** and **John Tierney** to pass the Green Jobs Act of 2007. This pathbreaking legislation authorized $125 million to train 35,000 people a year in such jobs.

Jones is also co-founder of the **Ella Baker Center for Human Rights** and **ColorofChange**. The former advocates for juvenile justice reform, police reform, youth violence prevention and green-collar jobs. With 400,000 members, ColorofChange has become one of the nation's most prominent online advocacy organizations focusing on African-American issues. Jones is also a senior fellow with the **Center for American Progress**.

This year, Green for All partnered with **Al Gore's Alliance for Climate Protection** to launch the **Green For All Academy**, which trains grassroots leaders to advocate for an inclusive, green economy. On September 27, Green For All helped produce Green Jobs Now—the first-ever "national day of action" calling for green-collar jobs in the United States. More than 600 communities in all fifty states participated, and more than 50,000 people signed a petition calling for government action to spur green jobs. Gore says of him, "Van Jones demonstrates conclusively that the best solutions for the survivability of our planet are also the best solutions for everyday Americans."

"The economic recession has seriously affected all the cultural and educational institutions in our country," says **Perry Rosenstein**, president of the **Puffin Foundation**, the co-sponsor of the Creative Citizenship award. "A green 'tidal wave' of reconstruction of the American economy can lead us out of this dilemma. Van Jones is pointing the way. We are proud to honor his leadership."

Each year the Puffin Foundation and The Nation Institute recognize a person who has challenged the status quo through distinctive, courageous, imaginative and socially responsible work of significance. Jones is the eighth winner; previous recipients are human rights lawyer **Michael Ratner**, *Democracy Now!* host **Amy Goodman**, educator and author **Jonathan Kozol**, journalist and author **Barbara Ehrenreich**, professor and anti–death penalty advocate **David Protess**, labor activist **Dolores Huerta** and civil rights pioneer **Robert Parris Moses**.

Reached for comment, Jones said, "I am so honored to receive this award and feel especially humbled to be in such esteemed company. With this support, I will continue my efforts to accelerate green economic solutions in disadvantaged communities."

DEADLINE POETRY, IN HARDCOVER: Our poet in residence, **Calvin Trillin**, has a new book out, more ambitious than his previous bestselling collections, **Obliviously On He Sails** and **A Heckuva Job**, both of which scholars locate in his Anti-Bush Period. In his new volume, **Deciding the Next Decider** (Random House), Trillin surfs the waves of change, fashioning a kind of Making of the President 2008 in rhyme, an all-new narrative of the election studded with poems that appeared in *The Nation*.

Attention is paid to forgotten hopefuls like **Mark Warner** and **Dennis Kucinich**, as well as the high-noon shootout between Hil and Barack. Less violent than *The Iliad*, funnier and more au courant than *The Dunciad*, Trillin's iambic pentameter (and even his dactylic hexameter) trots along at an infectious pace, sprinkled with jokes and oddball rhymes. On Bush's unpopularity: "His war's a crime—and as the leading perp he's/About as high up in the polls as herpes." On the Iowa primary: "'My name's John Edwards. How are you today?'… 'My name's Luke. Last week, I met you three times in Dubuque.'" On **Mike Bloomberg**'s brief candidacy: "Perot made Bloomberg somewhat déjà-vu-ish./ And to be frank, they pointed out, he's Jewish." A perfect Xmas stocking stuffer. Pure Hanukkah gold.

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man, cautious is the new risky. The great traumas of our day do not allow for cautious steps or responses.

At 143 years old (that's the *The Nation*'s age, not mine), we like a little bit of history with our politics. And while Lincoln's way of picking a cabinet has seized the public imagination during this transition, it's worth remembering another president's template for governing. Franklin Delano Roosevelt was compelled to become a bolder and, yes, more progressive president (if progressive means ensuring that the actual conditions of people's lives improve through government acts) as a result of the strategic mobilization and pressure of organized movements.

That history makes me think that progressives must avoid falling into either of two extremes—reflexively defensive or reflexively critical. We'll be wiser and more effective if we follow the advice of a *Nation* editorial board member, who shared these thoughts at our recent meeting:

1. It will take large-scale organized movements to win transformative change. There would have been no civil rights legislation without the movement, no New Deal without the unions and the unemployed councils, no end to slavery without the abolitionists. In our era, this will have to play out in two ways: organizing district by district and state by state to get us to the 218 (House) and sixty (Senate) votes necessary to pass major legislation; and harnessing the movement energy that can create a new narrative and thus move the elites in Washington to shift away from failed free-market orthodoxies.

2. We need to be able to play inside and outside politics at the same time. This will be challenging for those of us schooled in the habits of pure opposition and protest. We need to make an effort to engage the new administration and Congress constructively, even as we push without apology for solutions on a scale necessary to deliver. This is in the interest of the Democratic Party—which rode the wave of a new coalition of African-Americans, Latinos, young people, women and others. But the party has been beaten down by conservative attacks, so the natural impulse will be caution.

3. Progressives must stick up especially forcefully for the most vulnerable members of the coalition—poor people, immigrants, etc.—those who got almost no mention during the campaign and who are most likely to be left off the bus.

As a former community organizer, Obama has spoken of how "real change comes from the bottom up." It comes about by "imagining and then fighting for and then working for—struggling for—what did not seem possible before." That is the charge we should embrace. Let's mobilize to achieve what "did not seem possible before." KATRINA VANDEN HEUVEL

Calvin Trillin, Deadline Poet

The Three Bozos of the Apocalypse

To beg for some money to clear up their debt,
The boss men by whom poor Detroit is beset
Went begging to Congress as supplicants—yet,
Each boss man arrived in his luxury jet.
The boss men's requests are at this point unmet,
While Congress still wonders: How dumb can you get?

Hands Off the UAW

COMMENT

Before there was talk of a "transformational presidency," Barack Obama needed a transformational moment. It came in February at a sprawling General Motors plant in Janesville, Wisconsin, where the Illinois senator—trailed by a press corps skeptical about his ability to appeal to white union members—electrified thousands of autoworkers with a populist promise of infrastructure investment, new trade policies and a future for American manufacturing. His pre–Wisconsin primary vow to defend auto plants offered a lifeline to workers who knew that their industry—battered by years of bad CEO decisions, shortsighted federal energy policies and dysfunctional trade deals—was teetering on the brink of the disaster that unfolded as the year progressed. Days after Obama spoke to them, the autoworkers of Janesville voted in overwhelming numbers to make him the Democratic presidential nominee. It was a critical moment for the candidate, one that he would refer to repeatedly as the campaign progressed toward the November 4 election. Obama and his aides, taking counsel from Wisconsin Senator Russ Feingold, had picked the right room in the house of labor in which to make their move.

Seventy-three years earlier, United Auto Workers Federal Labor Union No. 19324 met near the plant where Obama spoke, forming a piece of the quilt of local unions that would become the nation's most powerful industrial organization. Today Janesville's UAW members, like their more than 1 million brothers and sisters nationwide, are members of a union that has for decades pushed the labor movement, the Democratic Party and the government to cross lines of racial and regional division in pursuit of social justice, sound yet humane economic principles and international solidarity. It was the UAW that fought for national healthcare and pensions and, when those policy initiatives were blocked by reactionary Congresses, forced corporate America to create a social safety net for workers and retirees that would form the model for union and nonunion workplaces across the country. It was the UAW that fought government- and corporate-sanctioned racial discrimination, integrating Southern factories, supporting the 1963 March on Washington and bailing the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. out of jail in Alabama. It was the UAW that withdrew from the AFL-CIO in the 1960s and '70s rather than take labor's big right turn; the UAW that opposed the Vietnam War; set up a research department that studied the cost of bloated military budgets to domestic progress; opposed apartheid in South Africa with such passion that when Nelson Mandela toured the United States after his release from prison, he insisted on celebrating with Dearborn's UAW Local 600. And it was the UAW that, three decades ago, scored Detroit for failing to design and produce small fuel-efficient vehicles as a re-

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sponse to rising oil prices and mounting foreign competition.

To a far greater extent than the auto companies, parts suppliers and distribution networks it has organized, the UAW has stood on the side of progress—never perfectly, as union dissidents have noted over the years, but invariably with an eye to providing economic security for working families and a future for communities in every region of the country that are threatened by a severe global economic crisis. Remarkably, however, it is the UAW that is under attack. Despite the union's sweeping, some argue draconian, concessions to keep the auto giants competitive—lowering company costs to such an extent that a vehicle produced in a UAW plant is now competitive with one produced in a nonunion one—a primary argument for delaying a federal bailout of the auto giants is the union. George Will argues on national television and in columns that Congress should "do nothing that will delay bankrupt companies from filing for bankruptcy protection so that improvident labor contracts can be unraveled." Mitt Romney preaches that it makes economic sense to "let Detroit go bankrupt." Even the *Boston Globe* editorializes—under the headline No Concessions? No Bailout—that the UAW should abandon efforts to protect workers and retirees, echoing the themes of the conservative National Legal and Policy Center, which claims, "The union will not allow companies to deploy capital in ways that the market would dictate, such as closing plants and layoffs."

The cruelty of such statements is writ large in Janesville. The GM plant there, though recently modernized and highly productive, is slated to close in December, leaving the 2,600 workers who cheered Obama in February without jobs. Forcing the auto giants into bankruptcy will hasten the shuttering of more efficient plants and will ravage the networks of parts suppliers, distributors and dealers that extend far from GM, Chrysler and Ford factory floors. That infrastructure supports more than 3 million workers, the vast majority of them non-UAW members, and along with them thousands of Main Streets.

The strategy of bankrupting the Big Three to break the UAW will not merely destabilize the auto industry. It will tear the heart out of a bulwark of industrial unionism and weaken a labor movement that economic royalists have attacked for decades as part of a broad campaign to weaken social and economic gains in every region of the United States. Anyone who think that breaking the UAW will only weaken the circumstances of autoworkers is missing the point of the royalist enterprise, which is to weaken the ability of all American workers to demand fair pay and benefits. As such, almost any bailout would be better than bankruptcy, but the best bailout is one that—perhaps by giving the UAW a piece of the action and placing union representatives on corporate boards, perhaps by giving states a stake—strengthens the hand of the one player in the auto industry that is committed to assuring that federal dollars are spent to defend the interests of workers and retirees while modernizing an industry Obama calls "the backbone of American manufacturing."

The dithering of tone-deaf CEOs, the Bush administration, Congressional Republicans and some postmodern Democrats could delay a full-scale bailout until Obama takes office. That's risky for an industry on the ropes, but this risk offers an opportunity. The new president can and should bring us full circle from the dawning days of the conservative era, when Ronald Reagan destroyed a union—the Professional Air Traffic Controllers Organization—in order to undermine the entire labor movement. Now Barack Obama can use a popular mandate larger than Reagan's to *save* a union, the UAW, and to revive the ability of organized labor to improve the conditions of union and nonunion workers in the twenty-first century. JOHN NICHOLS

Don't Repackage Gitmo!

COMMENT

President-elect Obama should be applauded for reiterating his promise to close the prison camp at Guantánamo. It has been a national embarrassment and a symbol of everything the Bush administration has done wrong in the "war on terror": detention without charges or trial, torture, and the establishment of military commissions in which handpicked military judges, not civil courts, try people on the basis of coerced evidence and hearsay. Shutting it down is important. However, we do not know what will be done with the 255 prisoners still detained there. Most of them will probably be sent back to their home countries, or else given asylum if it seems likely that repatriation will result in torture.

But what of others whom the Bush administration asserts cannot be released? And what will be the fate of any new detainees under the Obama administration? These questions should be answered as they have been for 200 years in this country: if there is sufficient evidence, charge them with crimes and have trials in federal courts; if not, release them.

Not much will have been accomplished if Guantánamo is shuttered while the practices that underlie it continue. Yet this is being suggested by some who may have Obama's ear. They argue that holding some terror suspects without trial or charges is necessary. A National Security Court composed of specially appointed judges without juries, using watered-down, minimal due process, would make the decisions.

Suggestions to repackage Guantánamo with a legal gloss must be rejected. Congress would in effect be legitimizing the long-term, perhaps lifelong, detention of people without charging or trying them in federal courts. It would be correctly perceived by the world as a continuation of Guantánamo, would undermine Obama's pledge to restore our moral standing and would weaken the foundation of one of our most precious civil liberties.

There is no evidence that holding people without charge and trial is necessary. Proponents of preventive detention claim that regular criminal trials cannot work, because the evidence is classified and may have been procured by torture. But classified information is dealt with in federal terrorism trials all the time, through the Classified Information Procedures Act. And evidence procured by torture is inherently unreliable and should never be used in any trial, in any court. A recent Human Rights First study by two former federal prosecutors of more than 120 terrorism trials found that the courts capably handled these cases without compromising national security or sacrificing due process. That conclusion is echoed by judges who have presided over terrorism trials, such as Judge John Coughenour, who concluded that the regular criminal courts are "an adequate venue for trying suspected terrorists" and that it would be "a grave error" to create "a parallel system of terrorism courts unmoored

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from the values that have served us so well for so long."

While the supposed advantages of a preventive detention scheme supervised by a special court using specially created rules are conjectural, the dangers of such a scheme are all too real. In the 1970s Britain established special "Diplock Courts" and administrative bodies to preventively detain and try Irish Republican Army suspects; the courts are now recognized as misguided efforts that undermined the liberty and fundamental rights not only of IRA suspects but of the British people themselves.

Shutting down Guantánamo is long overdue. We should not re-create it under another name. MICHAEL RATNER AND JULES LOBEL

Michael Ratner and Jules Lobel are, respectively, president and vice president of the Center for Constitutional Rights.

The Fall of Triumphalism

COMMENT

In a remarkable evocation of the strategic environment of 2025, the National Intelligence Council (NIC), a government intelligence service, portrays a world in which the United States wields considerably less power than it does today but faces far greater challenges. The assessment, contained in *Global Trends 2025: A Transformed World* (dni.gov/nic/NIC_home.html), was released November 20 and is intended to be read by President-elect Obama's transition team as well as the general public. "Although the United States is likely to remain the single most powerful actor," the council notes, "the United States' relative strength—even in the military realm—will decline and US leverage will become more constrained."

The report is devoted largely to an examination of the major trends—political, economic, military and environmental—that will shape the world of 2025. Many of these will be familiar to *Nation* readers: the rise of China and India as major actors in world affairs; Russia's growing significance as a power broker in Europe; the increasing role of corporations, crime networks and other nonstate actors; and the growing impact of climate change. But two key developments, by the council's own admission, stand out above all others: the decline of America's global primacy and the growing international competition for energy.

One can, in fact, read this extraordinary report on two levels: as a forceful indictment of the policies that have governed US foreign and energy policy for the past eight years and as a clear-eyed look at the devastating repercussions of those policies stretching far into the future.

If the Bush/Cheney administration ever stood for anything, it was the perpetuation of America's dominant international role for decades to come. This vision was first articulated during the Bush I administration, when Under Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz composed the infamous Defense Planning Guidance (DPG) for the fiscal years 1994–99. "Our first objective," the 1992 document affirmed, "is to prevent the re-emergence of a new rival, either on the territory of the former Soviet Union or elsewhere, that poses a threat on the order of that posed formerly by the Soviet Union." Although this precept was repudiated by Bush I in 1992 after the DPG was leaked to the press and aroused a storm of international criticism, it was later embraced by his son, who declared in a key 1999 campaign speech that if elected, he would strive to preserve America's paramount position "not just across the world but across the years."

This vision of enduring primacy was sustained, of course, by a belief that US military power was more than sufficient to overcome any conceivable adversary—with or without the support of allies. And it was with this confidence, this swagger, that the Bush/Cheney team initiated the invasion of Iraq. No plans were made for the post-invasion occupation or the possibility of a persistent insurgency, because it was assumed that the "shock and awe" of American power would produce an aftermath conducive to US interests. Similarly, the reluctance of US allies to join the venture was considered irrelevant, given the overwhelming military advantage enjoyed by American forces and the presumed availability of Iraqi oil to finance the entire operation.

Now, following years of debilitating fighting in Iraq and the systematic depletion of the Treasury, the prospect of extending American dominance "not just across the world but across the years" appears to have vanished for good. "By 2025," the NIC report suggests, "the US will find itself as one of a number of important actors on the world stage," forced to share power with other key players, including China, India and Russia. Inevitably, "the multiplicity of influential actors and distrust of vast power means less room for the US to call the shots without the support of strong partnerships"—which will be that much harder to form, given America's diminished clout and the competing interests of other players, including allies like Japan and Europe.

Another debilitating legacy of the Bush/Cheney years underscored in the NIC report is the nation's continued reliance on imported petroleum. Along with the epochal shift in political and military power from the United States to its competitors, *Global Trends 2025* points to the equally momentous shift in wealth taking place from the oil-importing countries to their major suppliers in the Persian Gulf and the former Soviet Union. "In terms of size, speed, and directional flow, the global shift in relative wealth and economic power now under way—roughly from West to East—is without precedent in modern history." Much of this largesse is being deposited in so-called sovereign wealth funds, huge investment accounts controlled by governments and used (among other things) to acquire large stakes in American banks and corporations—acquisitions that could, in time, provide major leverage over US political and economic policies.

Our continued dependence on imported oil—actively fostered by the Bush/Cheney team in myriad ways—is also contributing to what the NIC report sees as a period of intense geopolitical struggle over diminishing energy supplies. "Perceptions of energy scarcity will drive countries to take actions to assure their future access to energy supplies. In the worst case, this could lead to interstate conflicts if government leaders deem assured access to energy resources to be essential to maintaining domestic stability and the survival of their regime."

Not only will the United States be weaker in 2025 because of the hubris of Bush and Cheney; it will face a world of multiplied dangers, emboldened challengers and a paucity of reliable allies. MICHAEL T. KLARE

Michael T. Klare, The Nation*'s defense correspondent, is professor of peace and world security studies at Hampshire College. His latest book is* Rising Power, Shrinking Planet: The New Geopolitics of Energy.

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Eric Alterman

Refs, Worked (Redux)

There is some strategy to ["liberal media"–bashing].... If you watch any great coach, what they try to do is "work the refs." Maybe the ref will cut you a little slack on the next one.
—Former Republican Party chair Rich Bond, 1992

George Santayana, call your office. MSM refs are not merely "doomed to repeat" their historic capitulation to right-wing pressure groups; they are leading the charge themselves.

Exhibit A is CBS News. Scared silly in 2004 by blogger attacks on Dan Rather's carelessly sourced report on George Bush's war avoidance record—according to records unearthed in the discovery process of Rather's lawsuit—network execs sought, by any means necessary, to appease their accusers. This included rejecting a moderate Republican like Warren Rudman for their allegedly independent investigation because, as CBS News vice president Linda Mason put it, he might not "mollify the right." Instead, they settled on Richard Thornburgh, who was found to receive "high marks from the GOP." In a way, that's too bad, because CBS was actually considering—I swear I'm not making this up—going to Rush Limbaugh, Matt Drudge and Ann Coulter. How is such insanity possible? According to CBS News ex-president Andrew Heyward, "CBS News, fairly or unfairly, had a reputation for liberal bias," and "the harshest scrutiny was obviously going to come from the right."

A more recent but only marginally less disturbing case of a similar Stockholm-style syndrome among appointed MSM watchdogs can be found in a couple of recent columns by *Washington Post* ombudsman Deborah Howell. Readers of this column are aware of countless indulgences John McCain enjoyed from that paper, as well as some vicious and unfair characterizations of Barack Obama. Never mind. The *Post*'s problem, says Howell, is the fact that "thousands of conservatives and even some moderates have complained during my more than three-year term that The Post is too liberal; many have stopped subscribing, including more than 900 in the past four weeks." She calls these complaints "valid" and explains that part of the problem is that "journalism naturally draws liberals." Nowhere, however, does she speak to competing claims on these same journalists, such as the corporate interests of its owners and executives or the fact that journalists often overcompensate for their alleged biases—which, by the way, are far more conservative than liberal on economics and more hawkish than dovish on war and peace.

When Howell gets into specifics, however, she demonstrates just how transparent is her mission to mollify the same conservative complaints that so successfully intimidated CBS. She is concerned, she writes, about "the drumbeat of polling stories saying Obama and the Democrats were likely to win." Perhaps the *Post* should have made up some phony polls in an imaginary country in which McCain was defeating Obama and reported on those instead. Conservatives, she adds, also "felt the paper hadn't sufficiently scrutinized Obama." And Howell agrees. "Obama deserved tougher scrutiny than he got, especially of his undergraduate years, his start in Chicago and his relationship with Antoin 'Tony' Rezko, who was convicted this year of influence-peddling in Chicago," she writes, and adds, "The Post did nothing on Obama's acknowledged drug use as a teenager."

Howell's first charge is a curious one. A short search of the pre-epection *Post* archives using key words "Rezko" and "Obama" turns up twenty-eight hits; this for a story that has yielded not a sliver of evidence of wrongdoing on Obama's part. The second charge is not merely silly, in light of the nonimportance of this "story"; it's kind of crazy. How else to describe a sentence that actually links to its own disproof? I clicked on the words "acknowledged drug use" in Howell's column and, lo and behold, I found myself reading a 1,285-word *Post* story on page A1 headlined Effect of Obama's Candor Remains to Be Seen: Senator Admitted Trying Cocaine in a Memoir Written 11 Years Ago. Unless this is Howell's idea of "nothing," the *Post* employs an ombudsman who can't be bothered to click on her own links.

In a previous column, Howell did some number crunching and calculated that "The Post op-ed page ran far more laudatory opinion pieces on Obama, 32, than on Sen. John McCain, 13. There were far more negative pieces about McCain, 58, than there were about Obama, 32." She added, "The Post has several conservative columnists, but not all were gung-ho about McCain." Again, her point is difficult to discern. Should conservative columnists have been forced, Soviet-style, to write columns approving of McCain's hapless campaign?

Howell continues her calculations. Regarding the news, "stories and photos about Obama in the news pages outnumbered those devoted to McCain." True perhaps, but when you compare numbers, you must also compare contexts. Surely Howell is aware that for much of this period, Obama was receiving largely negative coverage. And when it comes to pure numbers, shouldn't she at least acknowledge that Obama nearly always campaigned on weekends while McCain often did not? Doesn't that automatically translate into more stories in a publication that covers, you know, news?

Sadly, these examples are not outliers. They are the result of an astoundingly successful conservative campaign to pressure members of the media to inject an anti-Obama tint into allegedly objective coverage, in the name of "balance." Not long ago, *Post* media cop Howard Kurtz complained that "web worship of Obama is nearly limitless." His evidence? Lots of people enjoyed watching the Obama Girl video on YouTube, while others thought it worth a few minutes to watch the nation's next president give his election-night speech on the web as well. The nerve of these damn liberals, wanting to see America's first African-American president give his acceptance speech. What's next, conservative concentration camps? ■

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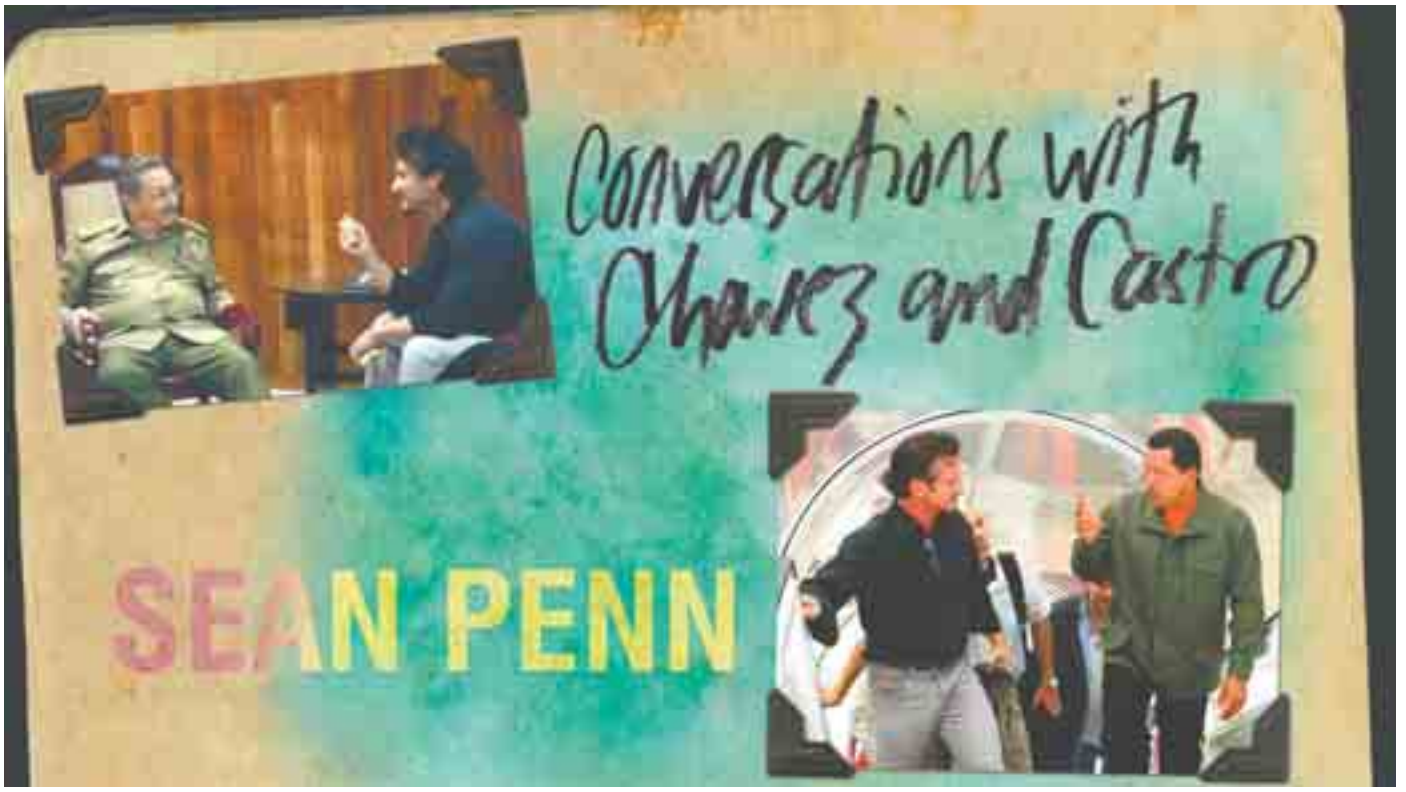

Soon to be Vice President–elect Joe Biden was rallying the troops: "We can no longer be energy dependent on Saudi Arabia or a Venezuelan dictator." Well, I know what Saudi Arabia is. But having been to Venezuela in 2006, touring slums, mixing with the wealthy opposition and spending days and hours at its president's side, I wondered, without wondering, to whom Senator Biden was referring. Hugo Chávez Frías is the democratically elected president of Venezuela (and by democratically elected I mean that he has repeatedly stood before the voters in internationally sanctioned elections and won large majorities, in a system that, despite flaws and irregularities, has allowed his opponents to defeat him and win office, both in a countrywide referendum last year and in regional elections in November). And Biden's words were the kind of rhetoric that had recently led us into a life-losing and monetarily costly war, which, while toppling a shmuck in Iraq, had also toppled the most dynamic principles upon which the United States was founded, enhanced recruitment for Al Qaeda and deconstructed the US military.

By now, October 2008, I had digested my earlier visits to Venezuela and Cuba and time spent with Chávez and Fidel Castro. I had grown increasingly intolerant of the propaganda. Though Chávez himself has a penchant for rhetoric, never has it been a cause for war. In hopes of demythologizing this "dictator," I decided to pay him another visit. By this time I had come to say to friends in private, "It's true, Chávez may not be a good man. But he may well be a great one."

Among those to whom I said this were historian Douglas Brinkley and *Vanity Fair* columnist Christopher Hitchens. These two were perfect complements. Brinkley is a notably steady thinker whose historian's code of ethics assures adherence to supremely reasoned evidence. Hitchens, a wily wordsmith, ever too unpredictable for predisposition, is a wild card by any measure who in a talk-show throwaway once referred to Chávez as an "oil-rich clown." Though I believe Hitchens to be as principled as he is brilliant, he can be combative to the point of bullying, as he once was in severe comments made about saintly antiwar activist Cindy Sheehan. Brinkley and Hitchens would balance any perceived bias in my writing. Also, these are a couple of guys I have a lot of fun with and affection for.

So I called Fernando Sulichin, an old friend and well-connected independent film producer from Argentina, and asked that he get them vetted and approved to interview Chávez. In addition, we wanted to fly from Venezuela to Havana, and I asked that Fernando request on our behalf interviews with the Castro brothers, most urgently Raúl, who had taken over the reins of power from an ailing Fidel in February—and who had never given a foreign interview. I had traveled to Cuba in 2005, when I had the good fortune of meeting Fidel, and was eager for an interview with the new president. The phone rang at 2 o'clock the following afternoon. "*Mi hermano*," Fernando said. "It is done."

Our flight from Houston to Caracas was delayed due to mechanical problems. It was 1 o'clock in the morning, and as we waited, Hitchens paced. "Very rarely does only one thing go wrong," he said. He must have liked the way it sounded, because he said it again. He was God's pessimist. I said, "Hitch, it's gonna be fine. They'll get us another plane, and we'll be there on time." But God's pessimist is actually God's atheistic pessimist. And I would later be reminded of the clarity in his atheism. Something else would indeed go wrong. Well, right and wrong, as you'll find out. Within two hours, we were taking off.

When we landed at Caracas airport, Fernando was there to greet us. He guided us to a private terminal, where we

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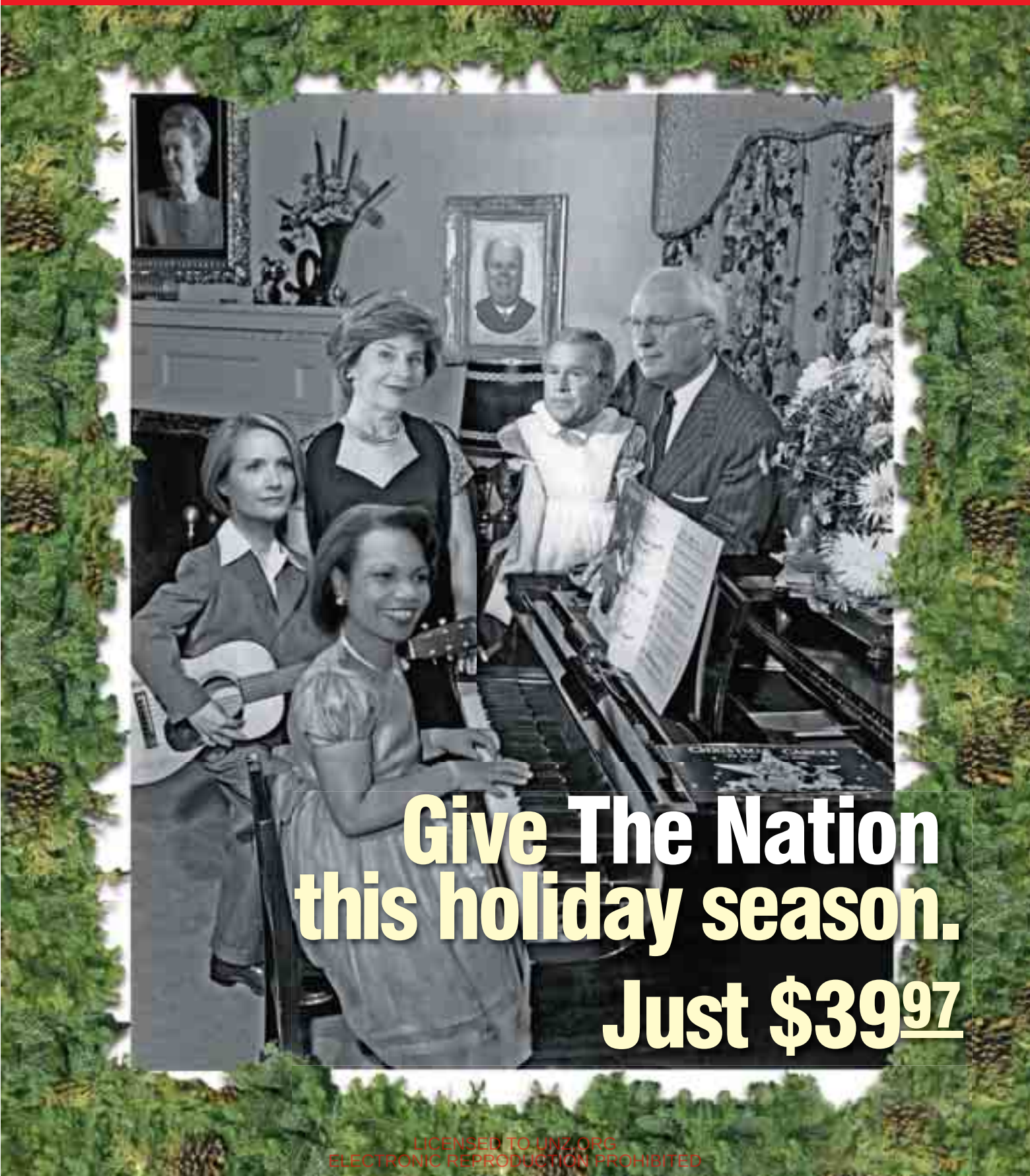
BACK BY POPULAR DEMAND!
(No, not them. The gift card!)



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waited for the arrival of President Chávez, who would take us on a stumping tour for gubernatorial candidates on the beautiful Isla Margarita.

We spent the next two days in Chávez's constant company, with many hours of private meetings among the four of us. In the private quarters of the president's plane, I find that on the subject of baseball Chávez's command of English soars. When Douglas asks if the Monroe Doctrine should be abolished, Chávez, wanting to choose his words carefully, reverts to Spanish to detail the nuances of his position against this doctrine, which has justified US intervention in Latin America for almost two centuries. "The Monroe Doctrine has to be broken," he says. "We've been stuck with it for over 200 years. It always gets back to the old confrontation of Monroe versus Bolívar. Jefferson used to say that America should swallow, one by one, the republics of the south. The country where you were born was based on an imperialistic attitude."

Venezuelan intelligence tells him that the Pentagon has plans for invading his country. "I know they are thinking about invading Venezuela," Chávez says. It seems he sees killing the Monroe Doctrine as a yardstick for his destiny. "Nobody again can come here and export our natural resources." Is he concerned about the US reaction to his bold statements about the Monroe Doctrine? He quotes Uruguayan freedom fighter José Gervasio Artigas: "With the truth, I don't offend or fear."

'Fidel is a communist. I am not. I am a social democrat.... Fidel is an atheist. I am not.... I believe in the Social Gospels of Christ.' —Chávez

Hitchens sits quietly, taking notes throughout the conversation. Chávez recognizes a flicker of skepticism in his eye. "CREES-TO-FER, ask me a question. Ask me the hardest question." They share a smile. Hitchens asks, "What's the difference between you and Fidel?" Chávez says, "Fidel is a communist. I am not. I am a social democrat. Fidel is a Marxist-Leninist. I am not. Fidel is an atheist. I am not. One day we discussed God and Christ. I told Castro, I am a Christian. I believe in the Social Gospels of Christ. He doesn't. Just doesn't. More than once, Castro told me that Venezuela is not Cuba, and we are not in the 1960s.

"You see," Chávez says, "Venezuela must have democratic socialism. Castro has been a teacher for me. A master. Not on ideology but on strategy." Perhaps ironically, John F. Kennedy is Chávez's favorite US president. "I was a boy," he says. "Kennedy was the driving force of reform in America." Surprised by Chávez's affinity for Kennedy, Hitch chimes in, referring to Kennedy's counter-Cuba economic plan for Latin America: "The Alliance for Progress was a good thing?" "Yes," says Chávez. "The Alliance for Progress was a political proposal to improve conditions. It was aimed at lowering the social difference between cultures."

Conversation among the four of us continues on buses, at rallies and at dedications throughout Isla Margarita. Chávez is tireless. He addresses every new group for hours on end under a blistering sun. At most he'll sleep four hours at night, spending the first hour of his morning reading news of the world. And once he's on his feet, he's unstoppable despite heat, humidity and the two layers of revolutionary red shirts he wears.

I had three primary motivations for this trip: to include the voices of Brinkley and Hitchens, to deepen my understanding of Chávez and Venezuela and excite my writing hand, and to enlist Chávez's support in encouraging the Castro brothers to meet with the three of us in Havana. While my understanding through Fernando was that this third piece of the puzzle had been approved and confirmed, somewhere in the cultural, language and telephonic exchanges there had been a misunderstanding. Meanwhile, CBS News was expecting a report from Brinkley, *Vanity Fair* was expecting one from Hitchens and I was writing on behalf of *The Nation*.

On our third day in Venezuela, we thanked President Chávez for his time, the four of us standing among security personnel and press at the Santiago Marino Airport on Isla Margarita. Brinkley had a final question, and so did I. "Mr. President," he said, "if Barack Obama is elected president of the United States, would you accept an invitation to fly to Washington and meet with him?" Chávez immediately answered, "Yes."

When it was my turn, I said, "Mr. President, it is very important for us to meet with the Castros. It is impossible to tell the story of Venezuela without including Cuba—and impossible to tell the story of Cuba without the Castros." Chávez promised us that he would call President Castro the moment he got on his plane and ask on our behalf but warned us that it was unlikely big brother Fidel would be able to respond so quickly, as he was doing a lot of writing and reflecting these days, not seeing a lot of people. He could make no promises about Raúl either. Chávez boarded his plane, and we watched him fly away.

The next morning we took off for Havana. Full disclosure: we were loaned an airplane through the Venezuelan Ministry of Energy and Petroleum. If someone wants to refer to that as a payoff, be my guest. But when you read the next report from a journalist flying on Air Force One, or hopping on board a US military transport plane, be so kind as to dismiss that article as well. We appreciated the ride in all its luxury, but our reporting remains uninfluenced.

'Very Rarely Does Only One Thing Go Wrong'

For me the personal stakes were pretty high. Getting on the plane to Havana shy of that guarantee of access to Raúl Castro was making me anxious. Christopher had pulled out of a few important speaking engagements at the last minute to make the trip. It was not his practice to leave others holding the bag. So for him, it was buy or bust, and he was becoming agitated. Douglas, a professor of history at Rice University, would have to return imminently for lecture obligations. Fernando was feeling the weight of our expectation that he'd be our battering ram. And me, well, I was depending

Actor/filmmaker Sean Penn's pieces have appeared in the San Francisco Chronicle, Time, Rolling Stone *and at HuffingtonPost.com, among others. This article is an adapted excerpt of the essay/interview "A Mountain of Snakes," which will appear in full December 1 at HuffingtonPost.com.*

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on the call to Castro from Chávez, both to get the interview and to save my ass with my companions.

We landed in Havana around noon and were met on the tarmac by Omar Gonzalez Jimenez, president of the Cuban Film Institute, and Luis Alberto Notario, head of the institute's international co-production wing. I'd spent time with both of them on my earlier trip to Cuba. We started catching up on personal matters on the walk to the customs office, until Hitch stepped forward and unabashedly demanded of Omar, "Sir, we must see the president!" "Yes," Omar said. "We are aware of the request, and word has been passed to the president. We are still awaiting his response."

For the rest of that day and into the following afternoon, we tortured our hosts with the incessant drumbeat: Raúl, Raúl, Raúl. I assumed if Fidel was up to it and could make the time, he would call. And if not, I remained appreciative of our prior meeting and said as much in a note I passed to him through Omar. Raúl I only knew about through what I'd read, and I hadn't a clue as to whether or not he'd see us.

Cubans are a particularly warm and hospitable people. As our hosts took us around the city, I noticed that the number of American 1950s cars had diminished even in the few years since my last trip, giving way to smaller Russian designs. On a sweep by the invasive-looking US Interests Section on the Malecón, where waves breaking against the sea wall shower passing cars, I noticed something almost indescribable about the atmosphere in Cuba. It is the palpable presence of architectural and living human history on a small plot of land surrounded by water. Even the visitor feels the spirit of a culture that proclaims, in various ways, "This is our special place."

'In Cuba we have one party, but in the US there is very little difference. Both parties are an expression of the ruling class.' —Raúl Castro

We snaked through Old Havana, and in a glass-encased display outside the Museum of the Revolution we saw the Granma, the boat used to transport Cuban revolutionaries from Mexico in 1956. We moved on to the Palace of Fine Arts, with its collection of passionate and political pieces from a cross section of Cuba's deep talent pool. We then toured the Higher Institute of Arts and later went to dinner with National Assembly President Ricardo Alarcón and Roberto Fabelo, a painter they had invited after I'd expressed appreciation of his work at the art museum that afternoon. By midnight there had still been no word from Raúl Castro. After that we were taken to the protocol house, where we would lay our heads till dawn.

By noon of the following day, the clock was ticking loudly in our ears. We had sixteen hours left in Havana before we would have to head to the airport to catch our flights back home. We were sitting around a table at La Castellana, an upscale Old Havana eatery, with a large group of artists and musicians who, led by the famed Cuban painter Kcho, had established Brigada Martha Machado, an organization of volunteers aiding victims of Hurricanes Ike and Gustav on the Isle of Youth. The brigade has the full support of government dollars, airplanes and staff that would be the envy of our Gulf Coast volunteers after Hurricane Katrina. Also joining us for lunch was Antonio Castro Soto del Valle, a handsome young man of humble character who is the 39-year-old son of Fidel Castro. Antonio is a doctor and chief medic for the Cuban national baseball team. I had a brief but pleasant chat with him and re-emphasized our Raúl agenda.

The clock was no longer ticking. It was pounding. Omar told me we would be hearing the decision of the president quite soon. Fingers crossed, Douglas, Hitch, Fernando and I went back to the protocol house to get our bags packed in advance. By 6 PM, we were on a ten-hour countdown. I was sitting downstairs in the living room, reading in the hazy late-afternoon light. Hitch and Douglas were in their upstairs quarters, I assumed napping to offset anxiety. And on the couch beside me was Fernando, snoring away.

Then Luis appeared at our open front door. I glanced over the top of my glasses as he gave me a very direct nod. Without words, I pointed questioningly up the stairs to where my companions lay. But Luis shook his head apologetically. "Only you," he said. The president had made his decision.

I could hear Hitch's words of doubt echo in my head, "Very rarely does only one thing go wrong." Was he talking about me? *Et mi, Brute?* Nonetheless, I grabbed at my back pocket to make sure I had my pad of Venezuela notes, checked for my pen, pocketed my specs and headed out with Luis. Just before I shut the door of the waiting car, I heard Fernando's voice calling after me. "Sean!" We drove away.

I'm Off to See the Wizard

Stateside, Cuban President Raúl Castro, the island's former minister of the Armed Forces, has been branded a "cold militarist" and a "puppet" of Fidel. But the once ponytailed young revolutionary of the Sierra Maestra is proving the snakes wrong. Indeed, "Raulism" is on the rise alongside a recent industrial and agricultural economic boom. Fidel's legacy, like that of Chávez, will depend upon the sustainability of a flexible revolution, one that could survive its leader's departure by death or resignation. Fidel has once again been underestimated by the North. In the selection of his brother Raúl, he has put the day-to-day policy-making of his country into formidable hands. In a report by the Council on Hemispheric Affairs, US State Department spokesman John Casey acknowledges that Raulism could lead to "greater openness and freedom for the Cuban people."

Soon enough I'm sitting at a small polished table in a government office with President Castro and a translator. "Fidel called me moments ago," he tells me. "He wants me to call him after we have spoken." There is a humor in Raúl's voice that recalls a lifetime of affectionate tolerance for his big brother's watchful eye. "He wants to know everything we speak about," he says with the chuckle of the wise. "I never liked the idea of giving interviews," he says. "One says many things, but when they are published, they become shortened, condensed. The ideas lose their meaning. I was told you make long movies. Maybe you will make long journalism as well." I promise him I'll write as fast as

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I can, and print as much as I write. He tells me he's informally promised his first interview as president elsewhere, and not wanting to multiply what could be construed as an insult, he singled me out from my companions.

Castro and I share a cup of tea. "Forty-six years ago today, at exactly this time of day, we mobilized troops, Alameda in the West, Fidel in Havana, me in Areda. It had been announced at noon in Washington that President Kennedy would give a speech. This was during the missile crisis. We anticipated that the speech would be a declaration of war. After his humiliation at the Bay of Pigs, the pressure of the missiles [which Castro claims were strictly defensive] would represent a great defeat to Kennedy. Kennedy would not stand with that defeat. Today we study US candidates very carefully, focusing on McCain and Obama. We look at all the old speeches. Particularly those made in Florida, where opposing Cuba has become a for-profit business for many. In Cuba we have one party, but in the US there is very little difference. Both parties are an expression of the ruling class." He says today's Miami Cuban lobby members are descendants of Batista-era wealth, or international landowners "who'd only paid pennies for their land" while Cuba had been under absolute US rule for sixty years.

'I've never said it publicly before.... We've had permanent contact with the US military, by secret agreement, since 1994.' —Raúl Castro

"The 1959 land reform was the Rubicon of our revolution. A death sentence for our US relations." Castro seems to be sizing me up as he takes another sip of his tea. "At that moment, there was no discussion about socialism, or Cuba dealing with Russia. But the die was cast."

After the Eisenhower administration bombed two vessel-loads of guns headed for Cuba, Fidel reached out to old allies. Raúl says, "We asked Italy. No! We asked Czechoslovakia. No! Nobody would give us weapons to defend ourselves because Eisenhower had put pressure on them. So by the time we got weapons from Russia, we had no time to learn how to use them before the US attacked at the Bay of Pigs!" He laughs and excuses himself to an adjacent restroom, briefly disappearing behind a wall, only to immediately pop back into the room, joking, "At 77, this is the fault of the tea."

Joking aside, Castro moves with the agility of a young man. He exercises every day, his eyes are bright and his voice is strong. He picks up where he left off. "You know, Sean, there was a famous picture of Fidel from the Bay of Pigs invasion. He is standing in front of a Russian tank. We did not yet know even how to put those tanks in reverse. So," he jokes, "retreat was no option!" So much for the "cold militarist." Raúl Castro was warm, open, energetic and sharp of wit.

I return to the subject of US elections by repeating the question Brinkley had asked Chávez: Would Castro accept an invitation to Washington to meet with a President Obama, assuming he won in the polling, only a few weeks away? Castro becomes reflective. "This is an interesting question," he says, followed by a rather long, awkward silence. Until: "The US has the most complicated election process in the world. There are practiced election stealers in the Cuban-American lobby in Florida…" I chime in, "I think that lobby is fracturing." And then, with the certainty of a die-hard optimist, I say, "Obama will be our next president." Castro smiles, seemingly at my naïveté, but the smile disappears as he says, "If he is not murdered before November 4, he'll be your next president." I note that he had still not answered my question about meeting in Washington. "You know," he says, "I have read the statements Obama has made, that he would preserve the blockade." I interject, "His term was *embargo*." "Yes," Castro says, "blockade is an act of war, so Americans prefer the term *embargo*, a word that is used in legal proceedings…but in either case, we know that this is pre-election talk, and that he has also said he is open to discussion with anyone."

Raúl interrupts himself: "You are probably thinking, Oh, the brother talks as much as Fidel!" We laugh. "It is not usually so, but you know, Fidel—once he had a delegation here, in this room, from China. Several diplomats and a young translator. I think it was the translator's first time with a head of state. They'd all had a very long flight and were jet-lagged. Fidel, of course, knew this, but still he talked for hours. Soon, one near the end of the table, just there [pointing to a nearby chair], his eyes begin to get heavy. Then another, then another. But Fidel, he continued to talk. Soon all, including the highest-ranking of them, to whom Fidel had been directly addressing his words, fell sound asleep in their chairs. So Fidel, he turns his eyes to the only one awake, the young translator, and kept him in conversation till dawn." By this time in the story, both Raúl and I were in stitches. I'd only had the one meeting with Fidel, whose astonishing mind and passion bleed words. But it was enough to get the picture. Only our translator was not laughing, as Castro returned to the point.

"In my first statement after Fidel fell ill, I said we are willing to discuss our relationship with the US on equal footing. Later, in 2006, I said it again in an address at the Revolutionary Square. I was laughed at by the US media—that I was applying cosmetics over dictatorship." I offer him another opportunity to speak to the American people. He answers, "The American people are among our closest neighbors. We should respect each other. We have never held anything against the American people. Good relations would be mutually advantageous. Perhaps we cannot solve all of our problems, but we can solve a good many of them."

He paused now, slowly considering a thought. "I'll tell you something, and I've never said it publicly before. It had been leaked, at some point, by someone in the US State Department, but was quickly hushed up because of concern about the Florida electorate, though now, as I tell you this, the Pentagon will think me indiscreet."

I wait with bated breath. "We've had permanent contact with the US military, by secret agreement, since 1994," Castro tells me. "It is based on the premise that we would discuss issues only related to Guantánamo. On February 17, 1993, following a request by the United States to discuss issues related to buoy

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locators for ship navigations into the bay, was the first contact in the history of the revolution. Between March 4 and July 1, the Rafters Crisis took place. A military-to-military hot line was established, and on May 9, 1995, we agreed to monthly meetings with primaries from both governments. To this day, there have been 157 meetings, and there is a taped record of every meeting. The meetings are conducted on the third Friday of every month. We alternate locations between the American base at Guantánamo and in Cuban-held territory. We conduct joint emergency-response exercises. For example, we set a fire, and American helicopters bring water from the bay, in concert with Cuban helicopters. [Before this] the American base at Guantánamo had created chaos. We had lost border guards, and have graphic evidence of it. The US had encouraged illegal and dangerous emigration, with US Coast Guard ships intercepting Cubans who tried to leave the island. They would bring them to Guantánamo, and a minimal cooperation began. But we would no longer play guard to our coast. If someone wanted to leave, we said, Go ahead. And so, with the navigation issues came the beginning of this collaboration. Now at the Friday meetings there is always a representative of the US State Department." No name given. He continues, "The State Department tends to be less reasonable than the Pentagon. But no one raises their voice because…I don't take part. Because I talk loud. It is the only place in the world where these two militaries meet in peace."

"What about Guantánamo?" I ask. "I'll tell you the truth," Castro says. "The base is our hostage. As a president, I say the US should go. As a military man, I say let them stay." Inside, I'm wondering, Have I got a big story to break here? Or is this of little relevance? It should be no surprise that enemies speak behind the scenes. What is a surprise is that he's talking to me about it. And with that, I circle back to the question of a meeting with Obama. "Should a meeting take place between you and our next president, what would be Cuba's first priority?" Without a beat, Castro answers, "Normalize trade." The indecency of the US embargo on Cuba has never been more evident than now, in the wake of three devastating hurricanes. The Cuban people's needs have never been more desperate. The embargo is simply inhumane and entirely unproductive. Raúl continues, "The only reason for the blockade is to hurt us. Nothing can deter the revolution. Let Cubans come to visit with their families. Let Americans come to Cuba." It seems he's saying, Let them come see this terrible Communist dictatorship they keep hearing about in the press, where even representatives of the State Department and prominent dissidents acknowledge that in a free and open election in Cuba today, the ruling Communist Party would win 80 percent of the electorate. I list several US conservatives who have been critical of the embargo, from the late economist Milton Friedman, to Colin Powell, to even Texas Republican Senator Kay Bailey Hutchison, who said, "I have believed for a while that we should be looking for a new strategy for Cuba. And that is, opening more trade, especially food trade, especially if we can give the people more contact with the outside world. If we can build up the economy, that might make the people more able to fight the dictatorship." Castro, ignoring the slight, responds boldly, "We welcome the challenge."

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By now, we have moved on from the tea to red wine and dinner. "Let me tell you something," he says. "We have newly advanced research that strongly suggests deepwater offshore oil reserves, which US companies can come and drill. We can negotiate. The US is protected by the same Cuban trade laws as anyone else. Perhaps there can be some reciprocity. There are 110,000 square kilometers of sea in the divided area. God would be unfair not to give some oil to us. I don't believe he would deprive us this way." Indeed, the US Geological Survey speculates something in the area of 9 billion barrels of oil and 21 trillion cubic feet of natural gas reserves in the North Cuba Basin. Now that he's improved recently rocky relations with Mexico, Castro is looking at also improving prospects with the European Union. "EU relations should improve with Bush's exit," he states confidently. "And the US?" I ask. "Listen," he says, "we are as patient as the Chinese. Seventy percent of our population was born under the blockade. I am the longest-standing minister of Armed Forces in history. Forty-eight and a half years until last October. That's why I'm in this uniform and continue to work from my old office. In Fidel's office, nothing has been touched. At the Warsaw Pact military exercises, I was the youngest, and the one who had been there the longest. Then, I was the oldest, and still the one who had been there the longest. Iraq is a child's game compared with what would happen if the US invaded Cuba." After another sip of wine, Castro says, "Preventing a war is tantamount to winning a war. This is in our doctrine."

'Iraq is a child's game compared with what would happen if the US invaded Cuba. Preventing a war is tantamount to winning a war.' —Raúl Castro

With our dinner finished, I walk with the president through the sliding glass doors onto a greenhouse-like terrace with tropical plants and birds. As we sip more wine, he says, "There is an American movie—the elite are sitting around a table, trying to decide who will be their next president. They look outside the window, where they see the gardener. Do you know the movie I'm talking about?" "*Being There*," I say. "Yes!" Castro responds excitedly, "*Being There*. I like this movie very much. With the United States, every objective possibility exists. The Chinese say: 'On the longest path, you start with the first step.' The US president should take this step on his own, but with no threat to our sovereignty. That is not negotiable. We can make demands without telling each other what to do within our borders."

"Mr. President," I say, "watching the last presidential debate in the United States, we heard John McCain encouraging the free-trade agreement with Colombia, a country where death squads are notorious and assassinations of labor leaders have been occurring, and yet relations with the United States continue to get closer, as the Bush administration is currently attempting to push that agreement through Congress. As you know, I've just come from Venezuela, which, like Cuba, the Bush administration considers an enemy nation, though of course we buy a lot of oil from them. It occurred to me that Colombia may reasonably become our geographically strategic partner in South America, as Israel is in the Middle East. Would you comment on that?"

He considers the question with caution, speaking in a slow and metered tone. "Right now," he says, "we have good relations with Colombia. But I will say that if there is a country in South America where an environment exists that is vulnerable to that…it is Colombia." Thinking of Chávez's suspicion of US intentions to intervene in Venezuela, I take a deep breath.

The hour was getting late, but I didn't want to leave without asking Castro about allegations of human rights violations and alleged narco-trafficking facilitated by the Cuban government. A 2007 report by Human Rights Watch states that Cuba "remains the one country in Latin America that represses nearly all forms of political dissent." Furthermore, there are about 200 political prisoners in Cuba today, approximately 4 percent of whom are convicted of crimes of nonviolent dissent. As I await Castro's comments, I can't help but think of the nearby US prison at Guantánamo and the horrendous US offenses against human rights there.

"No country is 100 percent free of human rights abuses," Castro tells me. But, he insists, "reports in the US media are highly exaggerated and hypocritical." Indeed, even high-profile Cuban dissidents, such as Eloy Gutiérrez Menoyo, acknowledge the manipulations, accusing the US Interests Section of gaining dissident testimony through cash payoffs. Ironically, in 1992 and '94, Human Rights Watch also described lawlessness and intimidation by anti-Castro groups in Miami as what author/journalist Reese Erlich termed "violations normally associated with Latin American dictatorships."

Having said that, I'm a proud American and infinitely aware that if I were a Cuban citizen and were to write an article such as this about the Cuban leadership, I could be jailed. Furthermore, I'm proud that the system set up by our founding fathers, while not exactly intact today, was never dependent on just one great leader per epoch. These things remain in question for the romantic heroes of Cuba and Venezuela. I consider mentioning this, and perhaps should have, but I've got something else on my mind.

"Can we talk about drugs?" I ask Castro. He responds, "The United States is the largest consumer of narcotics in the world. Cuba sits directly between the United States and its suppliers. It is a big problem for us.… With the expansion of tourism, a new market has developed, and we struggle with it. It is also said that we allow narco-traffickers to travel through Cuban airspace. We allow no such thing. I'm sure some of these planes get by us. It is simply due to economic restrictions that we no longer have functioning low-altitude radar."

While this may sound like tall-tale telling, not so, according to Col. Lawrence Wilkerson, a former adviser to Colin Powell. Wilkerson told Reese Erlich in a January interview, "The Cubans are our best partners in the counter-drug and counter-terror war in the Caribbean. Even better than Mexico. The military looked at Cuba as a very cooperative partner."

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I want to ask Castro my unanswered question a final time, as our mutual body language suggests we've hit the witching hour. It is after 1 AM, but he initiates. "Now," he says, "you asked if I would accept to meet with [Obama] in Washington. I would have to think about it. I would discuss it with all my comrades in the leadership. Personally, I think it would not be fair that I be the first to visit, because it is always the Latin American presidents who go to the United States first. But it would also be unfair to expect the president of the United States to come to Cuba. We should meet in a neutral place."

He pauses, putting down his empty wine glass. "Perhaps we could meet at Guantánamo. We must meet and begin to solve our problems, and at the end of the meeting, we could give the president a gift…we could send him home with the American flag that waves over Guantánamo Bay."

As we exit his office, we are followed by staff as President Castro takes me down the elevator to the lobby and walks me to my waiting car. I thank him for the generosity of his time. As my driver puts the car in gear, the president taps on the window beside me. I roll it down as the president checks his watch, realizing that seven hours have passed since we began the interview. Smiling, he says, "I will call Fidel now. I can promise you this. When Fidel finds I have spoken to you for seven hours, he will be sure to give you seven and a half when you return to Cuba." We share a laugh and a last handshake.

It had rained earlier in the night. In this early-hour darkness, our tires streaming over the wet pavement on a quiet Havana morning, it strikes me that the most basic questions of sovereignty offer substantial insight into the complexities of US antagonism toward Cuba and Venezuela, as well as those countries' policies. They've only ever had two choices: to be imperfectly ours, or imperfectly their own.

Viva Cuba. Viva Venezuela. Viva USA.

When I got back to the protocol house, it was nearly 2 AM. My old friend Fernando, looking much the worse for wear, had waited up. My companions had had quite a night. Poor Fernando had taken the brunt of their frustration. They hadn't known where I'd gone, nor why I had left them behind. And the remaining Cuban officials they'd been able to contact had insisted they stay put, should either of the Castro brothers spontaneously offer an audience. So they had also missed out on a last Cuban night on the town. After filling me in, Fernando went to get a couple hours' sleep. I stayed up reviewing my notes and was first at the breakfast table, at 4:45 AM. When Douglas and Hitch ambled down the stairs, I put the edge of the tablecloth over my head in mock shame. I guess, under the circumstances, it was a bit early (in more than just the hour) to be testing their humor. The joke didn't play. While Fernando took a separate flight to Buenos Aires, we had a quiet breakfast and a quiet flight back to home sweet home.

When we arrived in Houston, I realized I'd underestimated the thick skin of these two road-worn professionals. Whatever ice I'd perceived earlier had melted. We said our goodbyes, celebrating what had been a thrilling several days. Neither had been so catty as to inquire into the content of my interview,

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but Christopher headed to his eastbound connection with a parting word, "Well…I guess we'll read about it."

¡Sí, Se Puede!

I sat on the edge of my bed with my wife, son and daughter, tears streaming down my face, as Barack Obama spoke for the first time as the president-elect of the United States of America. I closed my eyes and started to see a film in my head. I could hear the music too, appropriately the Dixie Chicks covering a Fleetwood Mac song over slow-motion images in montage. There they were: Bush, Hannity, Cheney, McCain, Limbaugh and Robertson. I saw them all. And the song was rising as the image of Sarah Palin took over the screen. Natalie Maines sweetly sang,

> And I saw my reflection in the snow-covered hills
> till the landslide brought me down.
> Landslide brought me down…

■

How to Save Motor City

Letting Detroit fail: catastrophic. Transforming it into a lean green-machine-maker: visionary.

by MARISSA COLÓN-MARGOLIES

A lame-duck Congress balked on November 20 over a bailout for the auto industry, saying no action could be taken until the Big Three produced a viable plan for their own salvation. This was a victory for those who have been waging all-out war against a proposed government rescue package. Republican Senator Richard Shelby of Alabama has called the auto industry a "dinosaur" that should go extinct if it can't compete in the free market, while many of his colleagues blame everything from the Big Three's uninspired business model to unionized workers for Detroit's potential collapse.

It is true that General Motors, Chrysler and Ford are culpable in great part for the crisis they face. They have long suffered from institutional torpor, from an inability to consolidate redundant brands and make relevant, fuel-efficient cars Americans want to buy. Nonetheless, allowing GM or any of the Big Three to fail would be catastrophic. The auto industry represents almost 4 percent of gross domestic product and 10 percent of industrial output by value. A study recently published by the Center for Automotive Research estimates that a collapse of the Big Three would eliminate nearly 3 million jobs in just the first year, as well as $21.1 billion in Social Security receipts and $24.7 billion in federal income tax payments. Bloomberg has reported that a collapse of GM alone could cost between $100 billion and $200 billion in government-funded benefits. This figure greatly exceeds proposed bailout numbers.

A prepackaged Chapter 11 bankruptcy for GM is an option that has been floated consistently in op-ed pages, but it would be a risky move for the faltering auto giant. A prepackaged Chapter 11 filing in a different era would have allowed GM to restructure, protect itself from creditors and emerge leaner and more financially sound. But as *The New Republic*'s Jonathan Cohn recently wrote, in order to become productive while in bankruptcy protection, GM would need to be able to buy materials and parts from suppliers on credit through Debtor-in-Possession loans. The current credit climate makes it unlikely that GM would find creditors willing to lend the funds necessary to continue operations. In this case, GM would be forced into a Chapter 7 situation—total liquidation.

KEVIN W. FOWLER/AP

General Motors workers test equipment along the assembly line.

A government bailout of GM is the most viable solution to the crisis, but if Congress extends a lifeline it must be predicated on the condition that GM and others commit to systematic reform. Nelson Lichtenstein, a labor historian at the University of California, Santa Barbara, says the most pragmatic and progressive arrangement would be for a bailout of this sort to occur under the premise of "socially democratic planning" that would offer government loans to automakers as part of a larger economic recovery plan. Such a plan would include a jobs program like the New Deal–era Works Progress Administration, infrastructure projects and universal healthcare, which would alleviate many headaches for private enterprise. In return for government funds, the public sector should get equity in GM, a seat on its board, management oversight, a moratorium on golden parachutes for executives and ironclad agreements on fuel-efficiency standards. There should also be careful oversight of the administration of funds so that a bailout does not go toward propping up stockholders or allowing bond brokers to cash in on government investment.

Such an arrangement is vital to the real economy and is espe-

Marissa Colón-Margolies, a freelance writer living in Brooklyn, is a Nation *intern.*

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cially important to the industrial base and what remains of well-compensated blue-collar work in America. Gary Chaison, a professor of industrial relations at Clark University, notes that one of the ugliest aspects of the continued debate over the Big Three has been a virulent, thinly cloaked antiworker narrative. *Washington Post* columnist Robert Samuelson recently wrote that a GM bankruptcy could serve as a reminder to all of the "social costs of…overpriced unionized labor." He and other finger-wagging pundits, politicians and free-market adherents have blamed unionized workers (with their solid wages and benefits) for their complicity in the crisis GM is facing.

These arguments falsely vilify working people and stem from a superficial understanding of the modern automotive industry. Historically, the auto industry has provided good middle-class jobs that have come with high wages, impressive healthcare and pension benefits packages, disability and overtime pay—the kinds of jobs that are in too short supply in today's economy. But in recent decades, much of GM's manufacturing has been moved to nonunion parts plants in the South, allowing the company to drive down labor costs by avoiding United Auto Workers strongholds in the industrial Midwest. This, coupled with last year's agreement by the UAW to swallow concessions on a two-tiered pay scale, has dramatically lowered labor costs for GM. The UAW has also agreed to take over retiree health costs in 2010. These concessions—opposed by many union members for creating a divided workforce—have allowed GM to close the labor cost gap significantly with foreign manufacturers like Toyota. Analysts estimate that the 2007 agreement has saved GM $500 million in labor costs since its signing, and the company is set to save $4 billion annually starting in 2010.

Increased scrutiny must also be applied to the credit side of the equation. GMAC, GM's auto loan company, is the parent company of the nation's fifth-largest mortgage lender, Residential Capital, which is teetering on the brink of collapse under the weight of toxic assets and plummeting revenue because of the crippled housing market. ResCap lost $1.9 billion last quarter alone, putting significant strain on GM, which owns 49 percent of GMAC. The flailing GMAC—majority owned by Cerberus Capital Management, John Snow and Dan Quayle's private equity firm—has recently applied for bank holding company status. Becoming a bank holding company would provide much needed oversight and transparency, but GMAC must also be compelled to reform.

The loan company markets a high-risk investment to GM employees called Demand Notes. These offer check-writing privileges and a 5.25 percent return on investments, which are not FDIC-insured. GM workers have $3.9 billion sunk into these short-term debt obligations; should GMAC go down, they stand to lose retirement funds, college savings, the works. This dangerous arrangement deserves careful attention. As Robert Scott, an economist at the Economic Policy Institute, put it, "We cannot have another Enron." (When that energy company went bankrupt in 2001, more than 4,000 employees lost not only their jobs but also their life savings.)

Edward Sorel
THE *Mural* AT THE *Waverly Inn*
Text by Dorothy Gallagher | Introduction by Graydon Carter

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— *New York Observer*

"What keeps the amber-hued dining room of the Waverly Inn swarming with swells each night may be the three-paneled mural by renowned illustrator Edward Sorel that adorns the restaurant's west wall."
—*Vanity Fair*

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In exchange for a government bailout of the auto industry as part of a broader economic revitalization program, automakers must also be required to continue research and development of cars that can compete in a gas-starved age. According to Jay Baron, director of the Manufacturing, Engineering and Technology Group at the Center for Automotive Research, engineers in Detroit are already working overtime to achieve this goal. Automakers are designing lighter-weight vehicles by experimenting with "exotic materials normally associated with aerospace," like extremely thin steel, aluminum and reinforced composites. And then there is the much-vaunted Chevy Volt, a plug-in hybrid GM engineers hope will be able to go forty miles on one charge and recharge on the road. The Volt is the hard-up company's double-down bet, a sexy, eco-friendly machine that company execs hope will be to GM what the iPod was to Apple. But it will take a quantum leap in innovation to pull this off. The Volt's lithium-ion battery is priced at $10,000–$30,000, far too costly for the car to be marketed to a broad consumer base.

A bailout could provide the funds necessary to complete research and development of the lithium-ion battery and other potentially profitable green technologies. It will take time for the battery to become viable, as issues with cooling, size and cost continue to challenge engineers. Government support could help expedite this process while paving the way for the creation of jobs in related industries. Brett Smith, also of the Center for Automotive Research, thinks the lithium-ion battery could present an opportunity not only to reduce carbon emissions but also to create the kind of green-collar jobs that could reinvigorate the slumping manufacturing sector. Currently, Smith explained, most battery cells are manufactured in Asia, but mass production of the Volt could entail opening factories on US soil. The battery could become a niche product for the United States, but only if the government ensures that American automakers, in attempting to cut costs, do not buy batteries produced abroad. "In trying to reduce our reliance on foreign oil," Smith warned, "we should not replace it with a reliance on imported batteries."

Unlike the $290 billion already thrown at overleveraged financial institutions, a bailout along these lines would yield productive results for the real economy and would initiate a broader federal commitment to reindustrializing the country through a much-needed economic recovery program. If, as a part of this recovery plan, GM is given another shot at making a product people want to buy, at again generating well-paid jobs for American workers while moving domestic industry away from its reliance on fossil fuels, then that would be a government bailout worth considering. ■

Election's Over—Time to Begin

How millions of Obama volunteers can go to work for a new progressive agenda.

by MICHAEL PERTSCHUK

You've built an organization in your community and across the country that will continue to work for change—whether it's by building grassroots support for legislation, backing state and local candidates, or sharing organizing techniques to effect change in your neighborhood. Your hard work built this movement. Now it's up to you to decide how we move forward. —*David Plouffe, Obama campaign manager*

What do the Obama campaign organizers do now?

In the election's wake, left without a common cause are at least 20,000 seasoned and tested organizers. *Newsweek*'s Howard Fineman reports that by election day, these organizers had mobilized 5 million volunteers. To them must be added the hundreds of thousands of organizers and volunteers who performed parallel service for MoveOn, ACORN and other independent election campaign organizing efforts.

So, what, if anything, are the organizers to do next? Why not harness their skills to mobilize the millions of Obama volunteers—many of whom found their work to be the uplifting and energizing experience of a lifetime—into an army of demand for Congressional action on the Obama agenda and, where needed, to demand even more than Obama is willing to ask for?

MATT HOUSTON/AP

Vincent DeMarco, 2006

With a progressive president and a progressive Congress, why should this be necessary? The answer is the 15,965 registered Washington lobbyists, who spent $2.4 billion on lobbying just between January and September. Doubtless, with a Democratic president and Congress threatening actually to re-regulate business, they will have at least this formidable a war chest for 2009.

There was a blustery derby in the Democratic primaries

Michael Pertschuk, co-founder of the Advocacy Institute, is completing The DeMarco Factor: Transforming Public Will Into Political Power, *to be published in fall 2009.*

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about who could be tougher in standing up to the lobbies. But belligerent talk is a featherweight counterweight to the entrenched power of money. Fear, not bluster, is the only counterweight—the officeholder's fear of getting thrown out of office in the next election. But generating reality-based fear among power holders can be done only by massive organizing that threatens retribution at the polls.

Frustrating the vision of elected progressive leaders is what establishment lobbies do. But there are also models of progressive grassroots organizing that have added weight to bolster good leaders' demands. I want to describe one in particular, a template that the Obama organizers, volunteers and funders should find as engaging and rewarding as the work they have just finished.

This model had its genesis in the mid-1980s, when a small cadre of political students at Johns Hopkins University won control of the Young Democrats of Maryland, and for the next several years took turns lobbying through the State Legislature a series of significant progressive reforms. They never stopped. By 1989 their leader, Vincent DeMarco, with his Hopkins colleagues and a growing band of activists, was recruited by frustrated progressive executive and legislative leaders, blocked in the legislature by lobbyists, to mobilize public opinion.

Over the next two decades, they defeated, in serial statewide legislative and initiative campaigns, the gun lobby, six times; the tobacco lobby, three times; and, five times over the past ten years, the insurance and other corporate lobbies, including Wal-Mart, that were defending the healthcare system status quo. DeMarco's campaign template employs three strategies that conventional public interest campaigns overlook, or shun, but Obama campaigners would find useful: (1) reaching out to constituencies far broader and deeper than does the usual policy advocacy coalition; (2) educating the public to the need, the urgency, the worthiness of the policy before lobbying; and (3) then focusing on the election cycle.

DeMarco's campaigners organized uncommonly broad coalitions of children and youth advocates, health policy advocates, unions, civic associations, churches and other faith communities, and even some less benighted business interests: by 1996 in support of handgun control measures, more than 150 such organizations statewide; by 1999 for huge tobacco tax increases, more than 350 organizations statewide; by 2004 for several measures to reach toward "Healthcare for All," more than 1,000 Maryland organizations.

The breadth of their organizing was manifest July 30 when a new coalition that DeMarco had visualized and organized, working with the National Campaign for Tobacco Free Kids, succeeded in gaining a veto-proof 326-to-102 majority in the US House of Representatives for broad FDA regulation of the tobacco industry and its marketing practices. This they achieved, after decades of strong opposition from the tobacco lobby, by bonding traditional health advocates with multi-issue faith lobbyists ("Faith United Against Tobacco"), from the liberal United Methodists to the conservative Southern Baptists. This unlikely alliance with the Southern Baptists produced yes votes from half of House Republicans.

What makes these achievements resonate now is that in

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most similar policy campaigns, Obama's campaign veterans could engage in aggressive voter education designed to pressure all candidates for executive or legislative office to sign a pledge to vote for Obama's priority legislative proposals. The campaigners would follow up by publicizing the names of the pledge supporters and the refuseniks. In each election the voters rewarded pledge supporters and kicked out at least some of the nonsigners. Then the campaigners monitored the legislators, making sure they remained faithful to their pledges. (And held their feet to the fire if they didn't!)

Just as in this past election, participation in these successive campaigns can prove equally rewarding and addictive. The words of DeMarco's colleagues attest to this. One activist explained that these campaigns "give those liberal activists who are involved in various causes something to do that's very concrete, very tangible." Another: "You get that incredible feeling that you're doing good for the world; you're about to save somebody's life; you're about to prevent suffering. Like everybody else involved, when the opportunity comes around to work on another issue campaign you jump right back on. You know you're going to be on a wonderful ride, a ride worth taking."

And most relevant for those who toiled in the Obama campaign is this from one of DeMarco's co-organizers: "When you're successful in a campaign, you get it in your blood. You realize how exciting it is, and you want to keep doing it forever!"

For the progressive legislative leaders who enlisted DeMarco's support, the effect was also empowering. Maryland Congressman Chris Van Hollen, now the highly celebrated chair of the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee, served for many years in the Maryland Senate. He was a close ally of DeMarco's and the "inside" leader in many of his campaigns. Unlike all the other public interest lobbyists who came to him, says Van Hollen, DeMarco brought with him "a grassroots army of citizens paying attention."

The DeMarco template is well suited to the tasks performed by Obama's organizers and volunteers, because these policy campaigns succeeded by focusing on elections. President-elect Obama's supporters have a capacity to initiate and lead election campaigns focused on policy pledges—but on a much grander scale. The traditional progressive constituencies are primed to work for his agenda. And the thousands of organizers who marshaled those constituencies for Obama, not unlike DeMarco and his co-workers, are fully capable of making that happen.

The challenge is to transform a grassroots Goliath organized with only the election in mind into an equally formidable, coordinated and empowered force to transform the public will on the policies that the voters supported into focused political pressure on Congress.

And when even a good president strays or caves, hold his feet to the fire. ■

Letters

(continued from page 2)

prosecuting fossil energy industry executives for crimes against humanity. I worry that the status quo will continue to thwart the green revolution until our political and business leaders fear direct personal retribution. And they won't fear that retribution until the press whips up public outrage at what that leadership has wrought.

Kellen A. Carey

Causes Not Yet Won

Somerville, Mass.

Re Philip Green's "The Road to Socialism?" [Nov. 17]: I was not shocked by the antisocialist rhetoric used by Republicans against Barack Obama. But those attacks fell on deaf ears among young people. My peers and I (I'm 24) grew up without cold war fears, but we have collectively witnessed the horrendous effects of deregulated capitalism. As a former youth organizer for a democratic socialist organization, I am optimistic that my generation is open to the idea of social democracy, not only because of our affirmation of progressive change but also our exposure to the world. Friends returning from study abroad told me of their positive impression of social equality and benefits in Western Europe and Scandinavia. Unlike Green, they did not make the connection that this was partly the result of organized working-class power, but they did see what government as a force for good looks like. My generation desires our government to work for everyone, not just the privileged few. We want no more Katrinas—or Wall Street bailouts on the backs of taxpayers.

I also have hope for the future because my fellow millennials are not attached to laissez-faire capitalism, but we are to democracy. Obama's victory gave us the first mass-movement victory of our lifetime. But we all know an election alone is not enough. I agree with Green that democratic socialism can exist only if battles are won to expand democratic control and to curtail capital's unelected influence on society. There is a long way to go before we see a social democratic United States, but it may be only a generation away. Let people of all ages remember that we are "not champions of lost causes but causes not yet won."

David Duhalde

Fish Story

Gig Harbor, Wash.

As a commercial fisherman, I read with interest Emily Biuso's review of three books, *The Last Fish Tale*, *Tuna* and *Bottomfeeder* ["Hooked," Nov. 17], that speak to declining world fish stocks and the disappearing way of life of the commercial fisherman. Biuso uses a quote from Chesapeake Bay waterman William Warner's *Beautiful Swimmers*, published in 1976: "These here communities on the island and over to the mainland was all founded on the right of free plunder."

The idea that commercial fishermen are hopeless overharvesting Neanderthals is as dated as that "free plunder" quote. One would be hard-pressed to find a domestic commercial fisher in 2008, certainly one from the West Coast—or Alaska, where we work—who didn't understand the value of regulation to the preservation of fish stocks and their coastal community way of life. I would like to extend an invitation to Biuso to join my family on our ninety-foot fish tender, Beryl E, this summer in southeast Alaska so she can meet some commercial fishermen and see them at work.

By the way, if Biuso is looking for a group of contemporary free plunderers who have yet to understand the need for regulation, she might take a stroll down Wall Street with her notepad.

Guy Hoppen

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Books & the Arts.

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An Iranian policewoman (center) enforces the dress code during a crackdown in April 2006.

Stolen Kisses

by LAURA SECOR

A few years ago, in the course of researching her dissertation on changing sexual mores in the Islamic Republic of Iran, a young Iranian-American anthropologist named Pardis Mahdavi stopped by the Ministry of Education in Tehran to inquire about the country's sex education curriculum. Another visitor happened to be there. An older woman named Mrs. Erami, she was covered head to toe in the most conservative form of Iranian hijab: the tentlike black chador, held in place by the wearer's teeth such that it obscures half the face. Under her chador, Mrs. Erami wore another voluminous layer of hijab, including a hoodlike head scarf and a long, loose coat. Hers was the uniform of the government faithful, the traditional-minded and the sexually puritanical—the very image of the older generation that Mahdavi's main research subjects, Tehrani youth, rebuffed with their outsized vanity and sexual libertinism.

But Mrs. Erami had come to the ministry on a mission related to Mahdavi's. She taught courses on health, puberty and relationships at a Tehran high school, and she had come to talk to the minister about her frustration with her students' unwillingness to discuss sexual matters frankly with her. In a country where premarital sex with multiple partners is increasingly common but remains culturally taboo and punishable under the law, this severe-looking, chador-clad woman was, at a glance, hardly the person in whom one might feel comfortable confiding one's illicit activities or seeking intimate advice. Mahdavi didn't even feel comfortable letting the older woman see her nail polish, which is illegal but commonplace in Iran. Nonetheless, Mrs. Erami could not understand her students' reticence. "They are so difficult," she told Mahdavi. "I can't get them to talk to me, but I know what they are doing and what they are not doing. I had a teenage daughter myself, and I know that they are having a lot of sex, but not doing it right. I just can't get them to talk to me about it."

Mrs. Erami, it turns out, is one of the more dramatic products of the generational upheaval in Iranian attitudes toward sex. A conservative Muslim, she was not sympathetic, some years before her encounter with Mahdavi, when her gay son came out of the closet. Her husband threw him out of the

Laura Secor is a 2008–09 fellow at the Dorothy and Lewis B. Cullman Center for Scholars and Writers, at the New York Public Library.

Passionate Uprisings
Iran's Sexual Revolution.
By Pardis Mahdavi.
Stanford. 336 pp. $27.95.

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house. When their unmarried daughter announced that she had a boyfriend, Mrs. Erami slapped her and called her a prostitute. The daughter left home that day, never to return. And so the Eramis lost both of their children over their unwillingness to accept sexual behavior that had become the norm not only globally but even within many circles inside Iran. A year later Mrs. Erami's husband died, leaving his wife entirely alone and flooded with regret. That was when she devoted herself to sex education reform, both as a teacher and as a campaigner within Iran's education ministry.

This story is one of the gems buried in Mahdavi's new book, *Passionate Uprisings: Iran's Sexual Revolution*. Mrs. Erami's tale encapsulates the wrenching transformation of a society that, thirty years ago, attempted to resolve its divisions and ambivalences by legally and ideologically committing itself to tradition over modernity, even at the price of denial, repression and loss. Today's Iranian youth, especially those from the urban middle and upper classes, are no longer willing to accept that bargain, and the older generation is beginning to allow itself to be moved by the young. Mahdavi's best and most groundbreaking material has to do with the public health implications of this rift between generations and between acknowledged and unacknowledged behaviors, as well as the society's slow and patchy but often ingenious educational response.

In a country where run-of-the-mill dating and fashion are illegal, extreme practices have emerged in the private spaces occupied particularly by well-off, heterosexual Tehrani youth. Mahdavi shows up at a party, thrown by a mullah's daughter whose parents are out of town, that turns out to be a giant orgy. Smaller parties, too, frequently become occasions for group sex. Out on the heavily policed city streets, young people cruise for anonymous sex partners by passing notes into the windows of neighboring cars when they are stuck in traffic, or by driving to poor neighborhoods where nobody will recognize them as they scour the sidewalks for partners they hope never to see again. Adultery, for women, is punishable by stoning in Iran, but fully half of Mahdavi's married, female research subjects are unfaithful to their husbands; for many of them, picking up lovers is a regular form of recreation. And despite the legal requirement that women in Iran cover their hair and hide the curves of their bodies, fashion obsesses the women in Mahdavi's study. They apply layer after layer of makeup, and they find ways to make the hijab as sexy as the skimpy summer attire of Western women.

While this portrait of Iranian sexual experimentation may be shocking on its surface, it has grown familiar to most people who have visited Iran or followed cultural developments there in the past decade. Less well known is that, for all their promiscuity and seeming sophistication, many of these young Iranians suffer from a lack of sexual education and resources that fits the official culture of pious abstinence rather than the actual one of looseness and risk. The birth control method of choice among Mahdavi's informants is withdrawal. Women who take the pill frequently lack the most basic information and take it only erratically, depriving themselves of almost all of its effect. Condoms are considered so filthy and embarrassing that even people who share florid details about their sex lives with Mahdavi blush at their mention, and no one wants to be seen requesting them at a pharmacy. AIDS, educated young Iranians tell Mahdavi, is transmitted through visits to the dentist or hairdresser, and other STDs come only from a certain unsavory sort of woman. While wealthy women can obtain abortions—illegal in most cases but common, thanks to poor contraception—from sympathetic doctors at vast expense, poorer women acquire on the black market pills or injections meant for animals. Mahdavi went to a back street where dealers sell these medications, just to see how easily they could be acquired. A dealer sold her a vial of pills without the least instruction on what to do with them. Physicians she interviewed told her that they see a great many women seriously injured or rendered infertile by self-administered abortions meant for animals.

> For all their promiscuity, many young Iranians suffer from a lack of sexual education.

On its face, Iranian state ideology conflicts with the requirements of public health, given the sea change in public attitudes toward sex. Yet there is good news in Mahdavi's study. Close to the ground, where it counts, Iranian doctors, parents, educators and even institutions are bending to the forces of change. For example, since 2000 the Islamic Republic has required Iranians who seek marriage licenses to attend state-administered classes on family planning. One that Mahdavi attended in Tehran's central business district sounds perfectly appalling. A chador-clad woman shrilly lectures a room of gum-snapping, nail-filing, indifferent young women, offering the following counsel: "You must always be ready for your husband's sexual needs. If perchance he is watching a football game on television, you should be resting to prepare yourself, or else preparing your bed for the evening. If you should feel overcome by fatigue yourself, make sure always to ask your husband, 'Is there anything else you need from me?' or 'Would you like to have me later?' before retiring."

But then Mahdavi attends another such class, this time in the city's north, in the upscale shopping district near the Tajrish bazaar. This class covers disease transmission, contraception, fertility, mental health, marital relations and even female sexual pleasure. The teachers wear the less forbidding hijab—head scarf and fitted thigh-length coat—common among their students, and the women attending these classes, Mahdavi reports, confide freely to the teachers about their relationships and their sex lives. Here, and in her chapter about the older generation's response to the sexual revolution, Mahdavi shows us a society beginning to shake off its denial and rigidity out of the sheer necessity of serving the burgeoning needs of its young—a generation of adults who have either grown sympathetic to young people's yearnings or, like Mrs. Erami, recognize that they risk greater losses than they can bear.

Something major is happening—a generational shift, a process of social change on which Islamic law has only limited effect. But how deeply does it penetrate Iranian society, divided as Iranians are by geography and class? And how political is this movement in a country where politics is a live wire?

Mahdavi cannot be everywhere at once, and her study does not purport to explain the sexual behavior of everyone in Iran. Rather, it focuses on upper-middle-class, heterosexual Tehrani youth. This is a subculture worth studying—Tehran is a city of 14 million and a trendsetter for smaller Iranian cities—but Mahdavi is also aware of the study's limitations. Most significant, it excludes the social base of the ruling regime, which is rural Iran, where village life is the norm and values may be changing but where they remain, by all accounts, more traditional than in the bigger cities. Although she includes a few lower-class urban young people in *Passionate Uprisings*, we don't get to know them as well as we do the better-off informants. These omissions become significant mainly because Mahdavi makes big claims for her Tehrani revelers: their actions are not only political, in her view, but revolutionary; they are intended, finally, to bring about regime change.

In a narrow sense, this claim is obviously

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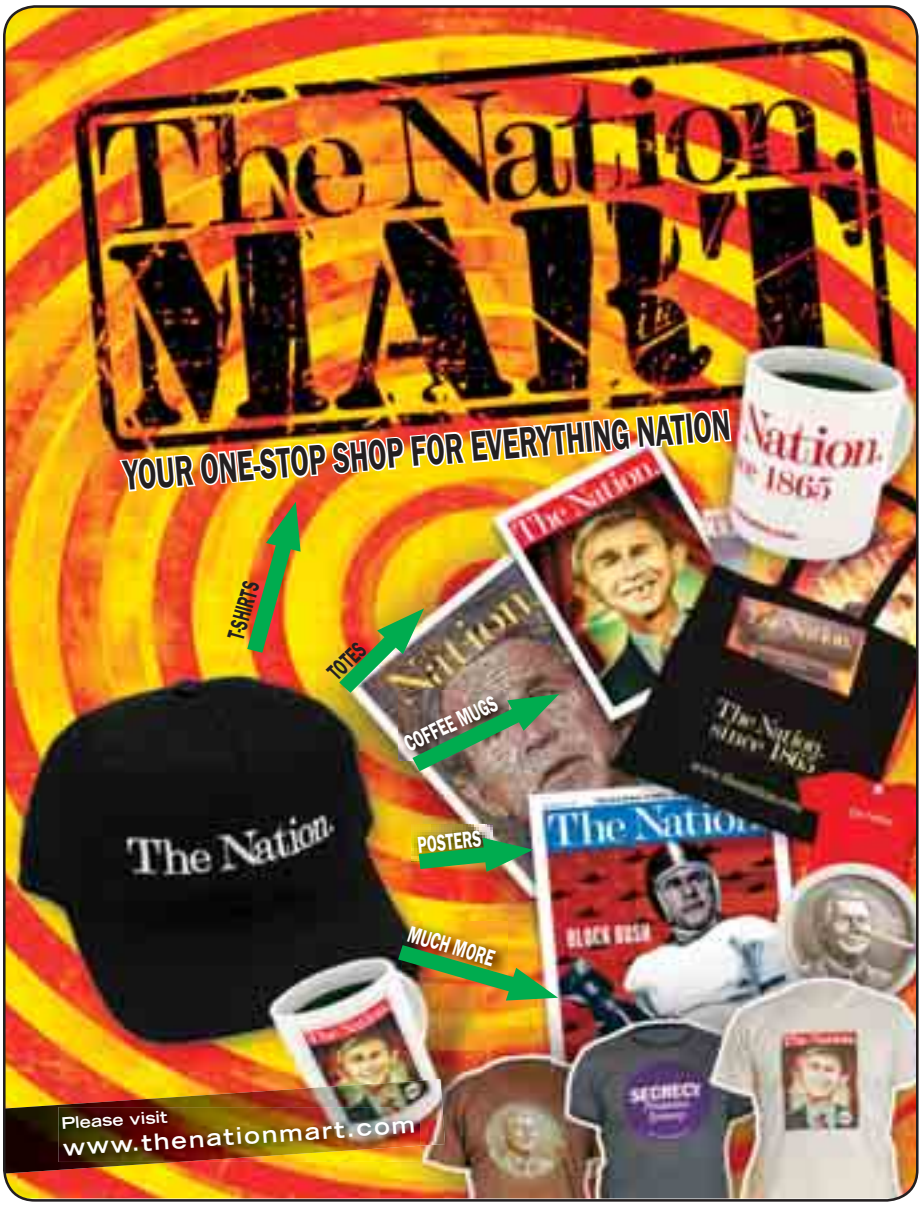
true. Insofar as the Iranian regime mandates Islamic dress and abstinence until marriage, young people who force the government to loosen these restrictions by defying them are engaged in a political act—one that is effectively changing an aspect of the regime. But there is something tautological about this observation, and Mahdavi does not draw out any deeper links between the political movements, like the one for secular democracy, roiling Iran and the changing sexual mores she observed.

What she does document is a groundswell of young people who reject Islamic sexual morality, feel they should have the right to associate with whomever they wish and to do what they please with their bodies, and who are willing to risk brief, but plenty unpleasant, run-ins with the morality police in the name of fashion, partying, dating and sex. Some of Mahdavi's subjects describe a night or two spent in a jail cell; others are whipped, and one couple is forced to marry. (Mahdavi doesn't say whether class differences among offenders figure in the ways the morality police mete out punishment.) Does Mahdavi imagine that these young people, if granted a modicum of personal, sartorial and social freedom, would fight on—for freedom of expression, freedom of religion, prison reform, representative government, an independent judiciary that respects the rights of the individual? For the rights and freedoms, in the end, of others?

Those who would choose to fight such battles, and to make the sacrifices that such a fight would entail, are few in any society, and Mahdavi's subjects are not to be faulted for choosing the already uphill battle to enjoy their youth. But the distinction is worth noting, mainly because it is not lost on the Iranian regime, which has shown a willingness to cut deals with its populace—loosening social restrictions, or turning a blind eye toward parties or translucent head scarves in upscale neighborhoods, precisely while tightening the screws on political activism and the independent press. Hence, Mahdavi is optimistic for the future of reform and brushes off the crackdown under President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, which has had only limited effect on fashion and sexual practices. But she does not mention the wholesale exclusion of reformers from government, or the imprisonment and torture of dozens of feminist activists, starting in 2006, for the crime of circulating a petition calling for the amendment of laws that classify women as second-class citizens. (Among other things, the petition calls for equal rights for women in marriage, inheritance and divorce; an increase in the age of criminal responsibility from 9 to 18 for girls and from 15 to 18 for boys; the prosecution of honor killings; equal consideration of a woman's testimony in court to that of a man; and an end to the capital punishment of female adulterers.) The political claims Mahdavi makes for Tehran's sexual revolution are, or should be, complicated by these developments.

Somehow, one suspects that the grassroots push to change sexual mores cannot be totally divorced from the effort, on the part of feminist activists but also some reformist parliamentarians and even liberal-minded clerics, to improve the status of Iranian women under the law. But the women in Mahdavi's study seem to occupy a wholly perplexing historical moment, or a palimpsest of historical moments. They live in a theocracy with a premodern, religious legal code, and they are undergoing, all at once, what we in the West would recognize as a 1960s-style sexual revolution, 1970s-style second-wave feminism and the contemporary postfeminist embrace of female sexuality, with all its complexities. The messages these women receive are mixed, to say the least. Mahdavi describes some of her married subjects as spending literally hours every day on their makeup and clothes and the rest of their time cruising the city for lovers. In a society that tells these women they should be chaste, domestic slaves to their husbands, who in turn have the freedom to acquire up to four wives and as many as 99 "temporary" wives, this could be seen as a kind of female empowerment. But there is something undeniably sterile about it as well.

The lives Mahdavi describes are rich in fleeting pleasures and bereft of deep engagement, whether personal, political or professional. It is a dissolution one feels at the heart



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of contemporary Iranian middle-class culture, and it has to do with the structure of the postrevolutionary state, which has written off huge swaths of its population in its economy, culture and politics. Unemployment is highest among educated young people, who traditionally live with their parents until marriage. Many twentysomething Tehranis—bored, sexually frustrated, infantilized by the state and their families—live like teenagers in small-town America. They spend a lot of time in cars, getting high on ingeniously obtained or concocted substances, and looking for sex. Is this a sign of political ferment or of a disused demographic—unmoored and decadent, dissipating its energies—for which its country has no use?

Mahdavi does not press such inquiries. Nor, notably, does she ask her subjects about religion. By engaging in sexual behavior the state deems "un-Islamic," do Iranian young people feel they are questioning the state's monopoly on Islam, or are they questioning Islamic sexual morality itself? Are her subjects evidence of a secularizing culture, or have they found a way to absorb Islamic spirituality while flouting Sharia law? The absence of searching analysis along any of these lines is striking, and it prevents Mahdavi's extensive collection of anecdotes and informants from rising above the level of observation.

In fact, what she calls ethnography often feels more like a thinly academicized memoir of the Iranian party scene. Mahdavi, who grew up in California and spent extensive time doing research in Iran, gets in the way of her subject by compulsively inserting herself, often in self-flattering terms, into the frame. We never hear her subjects speak without also seeing Mahdavi nod and smile. She includes her diary entries verbatim and emphasizes her feelings about the parties she attends. "My smart, beautiful friend from America. Knowing you makes me so cool," she quotes one of her informants as telling her. She quotes others saying that only she can help them with their problems, or that maybe the women in the beauty parlor are asking her why she isn't married because they feel threatened that Mahdavi appears to "have it all."

Although Mahdavi writes that she did research among poor youth as well as the middle and upper classes, in the one extended account of an outdoor party on the wrong side of the tracks, we hear next to nothing from the poor urban youth in attendance. Instead we get a scene in which a young woman admires Mahdavi's shoes and Mahdavi generously offers to trade her fashionable footwear for the girl's tattered sandals, to the girl's gratitude and delight. "I've never met a rich girl like you," Mahdavi quotes her as saying. "Who are you, anyways?" These authorial intrusions make the first five chapters of *Passionate Uprisings* feel aimless and amateurish. Fortunately, when we get into the material about public health and sex education, about which Mahdavi has done truly original and far-reaching research, the author steps aside and allows her material to order itself before the reader in all its richness.

After all, at the level of observation, there is still something about these cultural currents at which to marvel. It is not hard to see why Mahdavi felt that her young subjects were the leading edge of something significant, even if we don't come away quite knowing of what. Nearly thirty years into its Islamic Republic, Iran has become a country its revolutionaries never imagined, let alone desired. Its population has doubled; its countryside has modernized; its cities have burgeoned. Heavy-handed religious rule has produced a profound ambivalence about organized religion even among Iranians who cleave strongly to their private faith. Young Iranians, born after the revolution, burrow tunnels under the walls the regime has erected to isolate them from the West. And no amount of repression has succeeded in smothering the seemingly trivial but inextinguishable human impulse toward beauty, the playfulness of fashion or the electricity of sex. Maybe this is a story about Iran, with its restive political culture and loss of faith in institutionalized religion; maybe it's a story about Islam and the return of its repressed; or maybe it's just a story about the human spirit and the things it is not prepared to live without. ■

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Going…

The House Folds

by MAX FRASER

"If wishes were houses," observed sociologist John Dean in 1945, at the outset of the great postwar housing boom, "a clear majority of Americans would be home owners." Sure enough, between 1940 and 1960 the portion of the country that owned a home would jump from 44 to 62 percent, by far the most rapid increase in the ownership rate in any period of American history. Returning soldiers and families of modest means drove the surge in purchases, thanks largely to government-backed loans that made affordable mortgages widely available for the first time. The affluent society was taking shape. As Americans flocked to burgeoning suburbs, homeownership fast became the most

The Subprime Solution
How Today's Global Financial Crisis Happened, and What to Do About It.
By Robert J. Shiller.
Princeton. 196 pp. $16.95.

Financial Shock
A 360° Look at the Subprime Mortgage Implosion, and How to Avoid the Next Financial Crisis.
By Mark Zandi.
FT Press. 270 pp. $24.99.

Max Fraser is a writer and the director of The Nation*'s internship program.*

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coveted item in the inventory of the new consumer economy.

But Dean was a skeptic, an unlikely bear in a bull market. Most Americans might wish for a home to call their own—but that didn't mean it was feasible for them all to purchase one. Homes were still the biggest of big-ticket expenses, involving large initial outlays, long-term indebtedness, hidden future costs and unpredictable price fluctuations that might plunge a family into default if the housing market collapsed (as it had a decade earlier). Furthermore, Dean warned, "the whole complex problem [of] whether a specific family should buy and what is or is not a wise buy for it is an area of acute illiteracy" among the public. The decision to buy involved far too many risks to be taken so lightly by a political culture prone "to assume that for all families home ownership is desirable financially, morally, psychologically, and from a housing angle." Dean's book *Home Ownership: Is It Sound?* was one of very few at the time to challenge the pro-ownership consensus. "For *some* families *some* houses represent wise buys," Dean wrote, "but a culture and real estate industry that give blanket endorsement to ownership fail to indicate *which* families and *which* houses."

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Going…

Robert Shiller is also something of a skeptic. An economist at Yale, Shiller is a prominent figure in the modish field of behavioral economics, which draws on the study of human psychology and social behavior to understand how people make economic decisions. His bestselling book *Irrational Exuberance* (2000) foretold the dot-com bust while tech stocks were at their peak and investors remained convinced that stock prices would continue to rise indefinitely. For an updated second edition published in 2005, he added a chapter on the dangerously inflated bubble in house prices, a year before that market began to unravel, too. As prices skyrocketed by more than 50 percent between 1997 and 2004, far outpacing homebuyer incomes, Shiller cautioned that "irrational exuberance really is still with us." By 2008 prices had tumbled 18 percent nationally and plunged even more in the worst local markets, in south Florida and the Sun Belt. Around 12 million homeowners owed more on their homes than they were worth, and mortgage defaults had tripled, driving the American economy into recession and crippling financial markets around the world.

Irrational exuberance, or the "social contagion of boom thinking," is also the subject of Shiller's new book, *The Subprime Solution*, a slim but valuable addition to the growing literature on the ongoing collapse of the housing market. Shiller argues that "the ultimate cause of the global financial crisis is the psychology of the real estate bubble," the misguided idea that the market could sustain the unprecedented rate of expansion that began in the late 1990s. Dazzled by record prices and surging home purchases, Americans came to believe we had entered a "new era" of limitless growth, a story mostly endorsed by credulous news media and trumpeted by political leaders, mortgage lenders and Wall Street banks all eager to reap the benefits of the "ownership society." Millions of homeowners cashed in on rising property values with second mortgages or took out home equity loans to finance home improvements and other consumer expenditures. In 2005 the personal savings rate—the percent of disposable income that is not spent—was negative for the first time in nearly three-quarters of a century, as house-rich Americans forswore saving and turned their homes into ATMs.

Because a market slowdown seemed unlikely and a crash unthinkable, risky loans proliferated, particularly loans made to low-income or credit-poor "subprime" borrowers. Many were first-time homebuyers who flocked to low down payments with only a vague understanding of ballooning interest rates to come; at the same time, mortgage lenders like Countrywide ignored obvious long-term repayment risks to collect outlandish lending fees in the very short term. Besides, the housing windfall could be turned into an even greater bonanza on the international securities market, creating an added incentive to keep the faucet gushing. In 2006 lenders generated $615 billion in subprime mortgages, and when these loans began defaulting in droves a year later, sales of mortgage-backed securities were running at about $1 trillion annually.

Who was to blame for all this? Shiller rejects the conventional wisdom, which tends to overlook the excessive speculation at the market's core and focus instead on specific components of the boom-and-bust cycle in real estate: irresponsible borrowing, lax regulation of predatory lending practices and the inflationary monetary policy of former Federal Reserve chair Alan Greenspan. "These other factors were themselves substantially a *product* of the bubble," Shiller argues, "not exogenous factors that caused the bubble." Succumbing to the irrational belief that previous gains would guarantee future profits, various parties ignored obvious warning signs. House prices, historically very stable, had come completely unglued from economic fundamentals like building costs, population growth and incomes, suggesting that something anomalous was at work in the real estate market. And yet "even intelligent, well-informed people," to say nothing of the rest of us, "typically did not comprehend" what was happening in the run-up to the subprime crisis. Shiller offers that "understanding such a social contagion is a lot like understanding a disease epidemic"; by the time the housing bubble finally burst, we had all been infected.

The prevalence of the hallelujah gospel of speculative thinking is the key difference between the housing boom at the beginning of the twenty-first century and the one John Dean surveyed with such trepidation in the middle of the twentieth. A robust manufacturing economy, steadily rising incomes and the expansion of the middle class prevented an unsustainable price bubble from developing during the postwar period, and the wave of home foreclosures that had swept the

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country during the Depression years was a recent and grim reminder that the market for houses could go up and down. But the high of the '90s stock boom left investors and buyers feeling invincible. All kinds of people poured money into real estate because they were certain of a lucrative flip. "The idea developed that we ought to expect to make a lot of money," Shiller writes. "It is the change in thinking about ourselves that is the deepest cause of the bubble, and may be slowest to unravel after the bubble comes to an end."

Shiller's analogy of a social epidemic is useful for conveying people's susceptibility to contamination by irrational exuberance, but it risks obscuring essential differences of degree. Nobody expected to make as much money in the housing market as the financiers—lenders, investment banks, private equity firms, hedge funds and global investors—whose voluminous capital inflated the bubble to its giddy heights. This is the other major difference between the two periods: while individual consumers and the state subsidized the postwar boom, the recent bubble was largely the work of a vastly expanded financial sector, freed to speculate wildly in real estate by the deregulatory regime ushered in during the Reagan presidency and reinforced by Clinton-era economic reforms like the repeal of the Glass-Steagall Act. Overconfidence may have kicked off the speculative housing bubble, but overreaching capital kept it growing.

The American real estate market's appetite for greater risk, in other words, was stimulated by financialization, the rising dominance of financial markets and institutions in the world economy. "Residential mortgage lending was previously a very staid business," writes economist Mark Zandi in his first book, *Financial Shock*, a methodical and densely packed tour through the housing crash. Thirty-year fixed-rate mortgages—so-called "plain vanilla" loans—had been standard issue in the wake of the Great Depression, minimizing risk through the postwar housing boom and preventing another major outbreak of loan defaults and foreclosures, even during periods of economic downturn. But in recent decades a dizzying array of new lending and financing practices changed the rules of the game, eventually turning the housing market into what Zandi calls the "financial Wild West," which precipitated the current crisis.

"Wall Street drove the changes in the mortgage lending business," according to Zandi, by creating a market for home loans to be pooled and sold to investors as securities. Securitization, in turn, altered the basic economic calculus behind lending. "Making a loan and maintaining ownership of it was no longer as profitable as making the loan and selling it to an investment bank," where financial engineers were devising complex derivatives like collateralized debt obligations and credit default swaps to reap even greater dividends (which redounded to them in the form of hefty stock options and lavish bonuses). "There seemed to be no limit to what the securitization machine could produce," and ever more mortgages were needed to keep it humming. "Lenders now made their money solely on volume; the more loans they originated, the greater their profits."

In order to generate mortgages fast enough, lenders like Countrywide and Washington Mutual came to rely heavily on the most dubious of loans. Between 2004 and 2007, "the market was flooded with the riskiest varieties of subprime, alt-A, and jumbo ARM loans, the types of loans lenders would have been too nervous to make even a few years before." "As if by magic," but really thanks to super-low down payments and increasingly lax underwriting standards, "the average first-timer now had just enough income to afford to purchase a median-priced starter home." In 1990 only 4 percent of home loans allowed down payments of 5 percent or less; in 2007 a study by the National Association of Realtors found that the median down payment for first-time buyers was just 2 percent. By 2006 nine out of every ten new subprime mortgages came with adjustable interest rates that typically jumped upward after two years—the riskiest loans for the riskiest borrowers. But the securitization machine pushed the added risk off lenders' books and onto those of global investors, who saw the soaring real estate market as a sure bet and pumped in new capital to keep the cycle going. "As the housing bubble expanded, mortgage lending moved from merely aggressive to increasingly reckless and, in some cases, disingenuous and predatory," while "the most aggressive lenders forced the rest—even the more cautious among them—to either lower their standards or lose their market share."

Financial Shock devotes a chapter each to various other factors that contributed to the collapse of the subprime market. New construction went into overdrive during the

Unconditional Love Song

Later she would remember it started to pour

the storm blew everything out

before the coffee finished its brew

and she could finish reading a report

on some boys holed up in a derelict house

after stoning a swan to death

she wrapped her head in a towel

and sat down by the open window

even though the sound of the river was not there

the memory of the sound was

even though her husband did not appear in the door

talking to her about the day ahead

the day ahead was there

C.D. WRIGHT

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boom but glutted the market when demand slowed and foreclosures mounted. More than 2 million unsold homes sat vacant by early 2007, and the home-building industry, which had accounted for as much as a third of growth in the overall economy in the first half of the decade, tanked. Federal regulators first turned a blind eye to the mortgage frenzy, instead placing their faith in the market's ability to regulate itself; then they intervened to address only the most egregious lending practices. It was "too little and too late," Zandi writes; although "regulators didn't create the subprime financial shock…they did nothing to prevent it." Until October, when, backs to the wall, they passed a heavily modified version of Treasury Secretary Henry Paulson's $700 billion bailout plan, members of Congress had also "dithered" as the fallout from the subprime market spread throughout the rest of the economy—unsure of how to respond, unwilling to intervene quickly and unprepared for the extent of the crisis.

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Gone?

But none of them played the decisive role. "Of the places you can point the finger for the housing bubble and subprime financial shock," Zandi argues, "the most deserving is the removal of responsibility from the financial system. Lost in the rapid, wholesale rush to securitization…was the notion that someone—anyone—should ensure that individual loans are made responsibly, to responsible borrowers." The windfall profits were simply too great for anyone to risk betting against the house. Decades of deregulation and free-market orthodoxy had bred a fatal sense of self-confidence, a "belief that the ordinary rules of economics and finance no longer applied" and innovative methods for managing risk and maximizing profits could forestall the inevitable. At the peak of the housing bubble, "America's financial ingenuity seemed without parallel."

Needless to say, America's financial ingenuity turned out to be a chimera. With the first wave of defaults in 2007, the securitization machine went into reverse. Nobody knew which securities contained faulty loans, and so trading dried up altogether. Lenders stopped issuing new loans, and home sales plummeted. Prices, which had stumbled in 2006, crashed—more than 30 percent in cities like San Diego, Miami and Las Vegas—and home equity evaporated. Global investors began to doubt the entire American residential mortgage market, which at $11 trillion accounted for nearly 10 percent of outstanding bank loans and securities internationally. Major banks and investment houses that had bet heavily on mortgage-backed securities found themselves overleveraged and began posting record losses, their balance sheets crumbling under the weight of so much worthless paper. The endless supply of credit that had kept the bubble inflated suddenly disappeared. On the Richter scale of economic disasters, Zandi tells us, "the subprime shock was as serious a financial earthquake as any the nation had seen since World War II."

If anything, he underestimates the extent of the damage. More recent aftershocks at mortgage-industry giants Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac, mega-insurer AIG, savings-and-loan mainstay Washington Mutual, megabank Citigroup and leading brokerage firms Lehman Brothers and Merrill Lynch all occurred after Shiller and Zandi finished writing, but these events only confirmed how extensively the subprime crackup had demolished the financial system. When two of the country's oldest investment banks waved a white flag in a single weekend in September—Lehman was forced into Chapter 11; Merrill, a buyout by Bank of America—even Greenspan had to acknowledge the unprecedented scale of the meltdown. "This is a once-in-a-half-century, probably once-in-a-century type of event," he told an interviewer, "by far" the worst crisis of his career.

As Ben Bernanke, Greenspan's successor at the Fed, and Paulson scrambled to stanch the bleeding, much was made of the government's decision to rescue Wall Street from its ruinous excess. Like the Fed-backed buyout of Bear Stearns in March or the $150 billion in loans made to keep AIG solvent, the $200 billion of taxpayer money propping up Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac is surely indicative of the Bush administration's willingness to deviate from its laissez-faire dogmatism at the behest of financial interests. Such policies have been skewered as "Wall Street socialism," but in this case the complaints overlook the systemic problem in the American model of homeownership brought into relief by the bailout of the two government-sponsored but publicly traded firms, which together own or guarantee half of all home loans and are the engines of the US mortgage industry.

Before they were put under explicit national control, Fannie and Freddie enjoyed implicit government backing because of their mandate to finance affordable loans by funneling money into the private mortgage industry. They functioned as quasi-public agencies fulfilling a social duty, a market-based alternative to historically deficient public or federally subsidized housing reserved largely for the ghetto poor; and as such their role in the residential mortgage market grew significantly during the last two decades. The Clinton and George W. Bush administrations identified expanding homeownership, particularly among low-income and minority households, as a key domestic policy objective, and pushed the two firms to finance mortgages for millions of first-time buyers. During these years, the ownership rates for black and Latino households—who benefited particularly from the availability of subprime loans and have suffered disproportionately in the ensuing foreclosure crisis—grew by at least twice the rate for whites.

But Fannie and Freddie were pulled in another direction as well, because as publicly traded companies they were also beholden to their shareholders. Although they were far from the most reckless actors in the subprime

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saga, the two firms were buying billions of dollars' worth of increasingly risky loans from commercial lenders every month—Fannie's purchases of loans with down payments of less than 10 percent grew threefold between 2005 and 2007. Reselling them to investors around the world as overvalued mortgage-backed securities earned the companies outsized profits during these years while encouraging the deterioration of lending standards and adding to the inflationary pressure that ultimately sank the real estate market.

Fannie and Freddie clearly could have benefited from more effective regulation during the recent bubble, but in their twin and conflicting identities they embodied a core contradiction in the country's singular reliance on the private market to fill its housing needs. More than the self-destructive greed of financial institutions or the irresponsibility of individual borrowers, the subprime collapse has demonstrated the market's intrinsic failure to equitably distribute the benefits of homeownership across society. Subprime loans enjoyed government approval and the blessings of the federal regulatory apparatus because they seemed to broaden access to the mortgage market and promised to satisfy what Zandi rightly identifies as "America's fierce and long-standing devotion to the ideal of home ownership for all."

And yet with incomes mostly stagnant for the bottom half of the labor market since the early 1980s, and job growth weak or negative in recent years, increasing the ownership rate among subprime households necessarily entailed the assumption of significant debt burdens for families struggling even to keep up with inflation. At the bubble's peak, subprime borrowers were devoting an astonishing 35 percent of their after-tax income to paying off mortgages and other debt, a recipe for disaster once house prices began to fall and homes could no longer be used as collateral for more borrowing. In retrospect, it is obvious that these borrowers should not have bought such overpriced homes in the first place. But as John Dean understood half a century ago, the dominant "ideology of home ownership" cannot account for the reality that, except in times of robust growth and widespread prosperity, homeownership just isn't feasible for many families. "To say that such families 'ought to have more foresight' is not to recognize that lack of foresight… may be heavily culturally encouraged," Dean wrote, and "the home owner, by being 'unwisely susceptible' to the urge to own, may overburden himself financially." Presented as a means of leveling the playing field in the private housing market, the subprime solution was a debacle waiting to happen—the more open the market became, the more likely it was to collapse under the weight of added risk.

Almost 3 percent of American home loans now face foreclosure, the highest rate since the Mortgage Bankers Association began keeping such records in the 1970s, and more than four times the foreclosure rate during the last extended economic recession, in the early 1980s, when unemployment reached 10 percent. Shiller and Zandi end their books with the appropriate remarks about helping people keep their homes, but they quickly move on to what should be done to prevent a recurrence of the mortgage crisis (they are economists, after all). They agree on the need for stronger regulation to eliminate predatory lending practices and rein in the shadow banking system that turned the mortgage industry into a giant game of roulette in recent years. Both call for comprehensive, government-provided financial literacy training to steer people away from risky loans, particularly low-income Americans less likely to avail themselves of costly financial counseling services.

The ownership society abandons the most vulnerable to the whims of the marketplace.

Shiller speaks more broadly of "democratizing finance—extending the application of sound financial principles to a larger and larger segment of the population," through the more effective implementation of information technology and "revolutionary" economic disciplines like behavioral finance. He even proposes a new currency unit called *baskets*, which, unlike dollars, would be tied directly to the widely misunderstood inflation rate. A better grasp of how inflation skews asset prices, Shiller argues, would discourage a resurgence of the irrational exuberance that produces speculative bubbles. "If we had been accustomed to quoting home prices in baskets since 1890, then people would generally have known that home prices haven't basically changed in a hundred years (until the recent bubble), and they would never have gotten the idea—as they did in the early 2000s—that home prices always go up."

More sensible is Shiller's proposal for "continuous-workout mortgages" (an idea he returned to recently in the *New York Times* Business section), which would allow homeowners to routinely renegotiate the terms of their mortgages based on current market conditions and their varying ability to make payments. Like "regular checkups and preventive care rather than a sudden trip to the emergency room," continuous-workout mortgages would function as a self-correcting device to better manage changing levels of risk and prevent another pandemic of loan defaults and foreclosures. "The key to long-term economic success is rightly placed confidence in markets," Shiller says in no uncertain terms, and flexible mortgages, greater regulation, more responsible derivatives trading and more prudent borrowing will help the housing market act more rationally in the future.

Nevertheless, it's unlikely that such market reforms will do nearly as much to fulfill the fundamental social need for decent, affordable housing as would substantial investment in improving and expanding public housing; a reversal of the thirty-year decline in federal subsidies for low-income housing; or more muscular legal rights and income support for renters in overpriced urban markets. Nor can Shiller's and Zandi's proposals remedy the fact that for millions of poor people, buying a home and realizing a core component of the American dream will remain permanently beyond their reach, and that millions more will turn to long-term indebtedness for an only tenuous claim to ownership. Shiller and Zandi are rightly bearish on a real estate market overrun by speculation—but as Dean understood, the problem lies in the private market itself and, by extension, in the very notion of the "ownership society," which transforms social goods into commodities and abandons the most vulnerable to the whims of the marketplace.

As it is, the private housing market divides the country along the most basic of class lines—owners and nonowners. The range of material advantages that benefit the propertied (from the starkly regressive mortgage interest deduction in the tax code to a home's equity-building potential) only deepens an already profound wealth gap. A more stable market will not repair this basic inequality on its own. Without a comprehensive federal commitment to guarantee affordable housing for all, the ownership society will remain nothing more than a myth, a house of cards for too many working- and middle-class families forced to borrow beyond their means to subsidize a diminished standard of living. If the growth and bursting of the subprime bubble teaches us anything, it should be that most Americans still wish they owned a home but too many of them still can't afford one. ■

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Spreading the Wealth

by MARK ENGLER

Warren Buffett, ranked by *Forbes* in 2008 as the world's wealthiest man, is no moral philosopher. Yet he is capable of raising a tricky philosophical quandary. Reflecting on his tremendous riches, he has attributed his fortune largely to chance. "It just so happens that I was in the right place at the right time," Buffett has said. "I really wouldn't have made a difference if I were born in Bangladesh. Or if I was born here in 1700.… I just got lucky as hell.… Stick me [someplace else] and I could say I know how to allocate capital and value business. But they'd say, so what?"

In crediting luck, Buffett not only points to the birth lottery, in which some people are born into more privileged circumstances than others, but also recognizes that to a great extent he owes the accomplishments of his professional life to the manifold contributions of other people, known and unknown, past and present. They have collectively done Buffett enormous favors, affording him security and education, providing modern infrastructure, science and communications systems and creating a sophisticated market in which he could do business. Because of this, Buffett claims, "society is responsible for a very significant percentage of what I've earned."

Unjust Deserts
How the Rich Are Taking Our Common Inheritance and Why We Should Take It Back.
By Gar Alperovitz and Lew Daly.
New Press. 230 pp. $24.95.

"But if this is true," ask Gar Alperovitz and Lew Daly in *Unjust Deserts*, "doesn't society deserve a very significant share of what [Buffett] has received?" This question clearly indicates how thoroughly Alperovitz and Daly want their new book to upend commonplace notions about the relationships between economic growth, productivity and wealth. The duo cite "extraordinary developments" in the study of knowledge and economic growth as the foundation of their contentions. But they are actually returning the economic discussion to where it started, with Smith, Ricardo, Mill and Marx—to moral philosophy and debates about the values that should inform public policy. Their foremost ethical question is, given that we owe most of our productivity to a common social inheritance, to what extent can we say that we have "earned" our personal wealth? If we see far, it is because we stand on the shoulders of giants, the argument goes. Therefore, a large portion of what we claim as payment for our productivity should actually go to the Goliaths who are doing the heavy work of holding us up. Even if your eyesight is much better than

Mark Engler, a senior analyst with Foreign Policy in Focus, is the author of How to Rule the World: The Coming Battle Over the Global Economy *(Nation Books). He can be reached via www.DemocracyUprising.com.*

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average, your individual claim is limited.

Most of us with regular work lives get up in the morning, expend our energy and intelligence to meet the day's challenges and retire, depleted, in the evening. In this respect, Alperovitz and Daly claim, we toil away our workdays just as, for example, subsistence farmers did for thousands of years. What makes us more "productive" than these forebears—in the sense that they often struggled to ward off starvation, while we, relatively speaking, are surrounded by abundance—is not our individual strength, initiative or daring. Rather, it is our inheritance of thousands of years of cultural knowledge, innovation and discovery. Owing to this legacy, a person in the United States working the same number of hours as an American from as recently as 1870 will produce, on average, some fifteen times more economic output.

As early as the 1950s, economists began establishing a greater role for socially accumulated knowledge in mainstream understandings of economic growth. Alperovitz and Daly note that Robert Solow "calculated that nearly 90 percent of productivity growth in the first half of the twentieth century (from 1909 to 1949) could only be attributed to 'technological change in the broadest sense.'" This suggestion was a radical shift away from accounts that stressed the more specific agency of capitalists and entrepreneurs—or of laborers, for that matter—in expanding our economy.

But would progress in the realm of science and technology truly have happened without the grit and determination of hard-working innovators? Because Alexander Graham Bell invented the telephone, a creation of tremendous social value, doesn't he deserve to be exalted as a genius and richly rewarded for his patent? Not necessarily. The telephone, as it turns out, was simultaneously invented by another innovator, Elisha Gray, who visited the patent office the same day as Bell with a superior design for transmitting vocal sounds but who lagged behind Bell in completing the patent process. Five years earlier, an Italian immigrant named Antonio Meucci had declared the invention of a "voice telegraphy device"; he merely lacked the $10 required to register his work. With or without Bell, the telephone would have arrived.

This example is not an isolated incident. As Alperovitz and Daly write, the pattern of simultaneous invention "is so obvious to modern scholars that it is no longer considered controversial." New innovations rely upon thousands of previous advances in understanding and technical capability: "What is called an 'invention,' is always a combination of diverse constituent elements, mostly drawn from existing technology." Yet even as mainstream economists cite the increasing role of this socially accumulated legacy in driving our "knowledge economy," inequality grows ever more severe. In 2004, the top 1 percent of American households held almost half of all "non-retirement account stocks, mutual funds, and trusts" and Bill Gates's net worth alone "was more than twice the direct stock holdings of the entire bottom half of the U.S. population."

Avoiding the Marxist tradition, Alperovitz and Daly tap a long stream of philosophical thought, running through Locke, Ricardo and Mill, that distinguishes between "earned" and "unearned" gains. "Nothing is more deeply held among ordinary people than the idea that a person is entitled to what he creates or his efforts produce," they note. But if a person reaps gains through no effort of his own, society has a quite different view of his deservingness, or what philosophers know as "desert."

STEVE JOHNSON

Gar Alperovitz, 2006

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like Einstein and Newton are not around to claim their cut of your paycheck. What's left, then, is the state. Ultimately, what Alperovitz and Daly dub the "knowledge inheritance theory of distributive justice" offers a much deeper justification for government-imposed taxation than what Americans are normally challenged to consider. The closest we have come to hearing these arguments in contemporary political debate was in the recent fight over the estate tax, a levy dubbed by conservatives as the "death tax" and by some defenders as the "Paris Hilton tax." "Responsible wealth" advocate Chuck Collins, who wrote a book with Bill Gates in defense of the estate tax, has argued that the justice of such a tax is rooted in an appreciation of social contributions to prosperity, an idea that has previously been recognized in American political life. In *10 Excellent Reasons Not to Hate Taxes*, Collins quotes Andrew Carnegie, one of the key figures of our country's first Gilded Age, who approved of taxing accumulated wealth: "Of all forms of taxation this seems the wisest," Carnegie held. "Men who continue hoarding great sums all of their lives, the proper use of which for public ends would work good to the community from which it chiefly came, should be made to feel that the community, in the form of the State, cannot thus be deprived of its proper share."

In various articles and in a book published in 2005, *America Beyond Capitalism*, Alperovitz has rejected the statism of former Communist bloc economies, and he has expressed a desire to craft a progressive vision that "takes us beyond both traditional systems" of socialism and capitalism. Yet this type of "neither right nor left, but forward" rhetoric represents a fairly weak dodge. The actual political tradition Alperovitz and Daly seek to revive has deep roots in classical economics and represents a long-established strand of non-Marxist socialism. The authors show sympathy for nineteenth-century American reformer Henry George, who drew an international following with his belief that land should be the common property of humanity. George promoted free trade and productive business, but he wanted state control of monopolies and argued in his bestselling *Progress and Poverty* for a steep tax on parasitic rent-seeking landlords. Alperovitz and Daly also align themselves with many of the leading lights of the Fabian Society, a group of British intellectuals who were influential in shaping the early Labour Party around 1900.

Just as unionists who believed in the productive power of labor were critical of George's sole focus on land, the leftward ranks of today's political economists may be skeptical of the overwhelming weight of "knowledge" in Alperovitz and Daly's formulations. But most would probably agree that the authors strike upon a vital topic when they highlight the need for the benefits from productivity gains to be shared throughout society.

As recently as the 1970s, there were discussions on college campuses of how people would while away all their spare hours after modern timesaving technology improved efficiency and inevitably shortened their working days. Since then, productivity has indeed increased dramatically, but working people have experienced a bitter twist: owing largely to the waning power of organized labor, real wages have been stagnant and hours at the office have only lengthened.

The Marxists of old criticized the gradualist tactics of Fabianism, accusing the British reformers of being naïve utopians who wanted socialist ends without the class struggle. Whatever the moral validity of Alperovitz and Daly's argument about wealth, following through on its public policy implications will require a long and hard fight. And it's not clear from their book that Alperovitz and Daly are up for a rumble. When it comes to how we might "take back our common inheritance," their concluding call to arms tepidly invokes a "renewed moral and political understanding of [our] responsibilities."

The best Alperovitz has suggested in his recent writings is that policy-makers concern themselves more with taxing wealth than income, and that they focus on going after the top 2 percent of households, leaving those few elites vastly outnumbered by the remaining 98 percent of the population. This is a sound position, but it is hardly a silver bullet. At the same time, the nation now seems uniquely prepared for a new debate about value and desert. Few moments could be riper for revisiting the connection between our economy and our social ethics. As housing values—the bedrock asset of the American middle class—fall, stocks plunge and retirement investment accounts are wiped out, there is an acute awareness that things do not find their worth just in the market's valuation on a given day. And even without unusually candid voices like Warren Buffett's fanning their doubts, Americans have begun to conclude that CEOs are not so worthy as their bloated compensation packages suggest.

There is a growing consensus, too, in favor of a more robust public compact to regulate the conditions under which we are together able to live, save and retire. Recent scholarly notions about "the developing trajectory of the knowledge economy" likely have less power than Alperovitz and Daly imagine to bring about a shift toward the social. But amid the ruins of our new Gilded Age, a devalued and depressed American public may nevertheless be ready to demand more. ■

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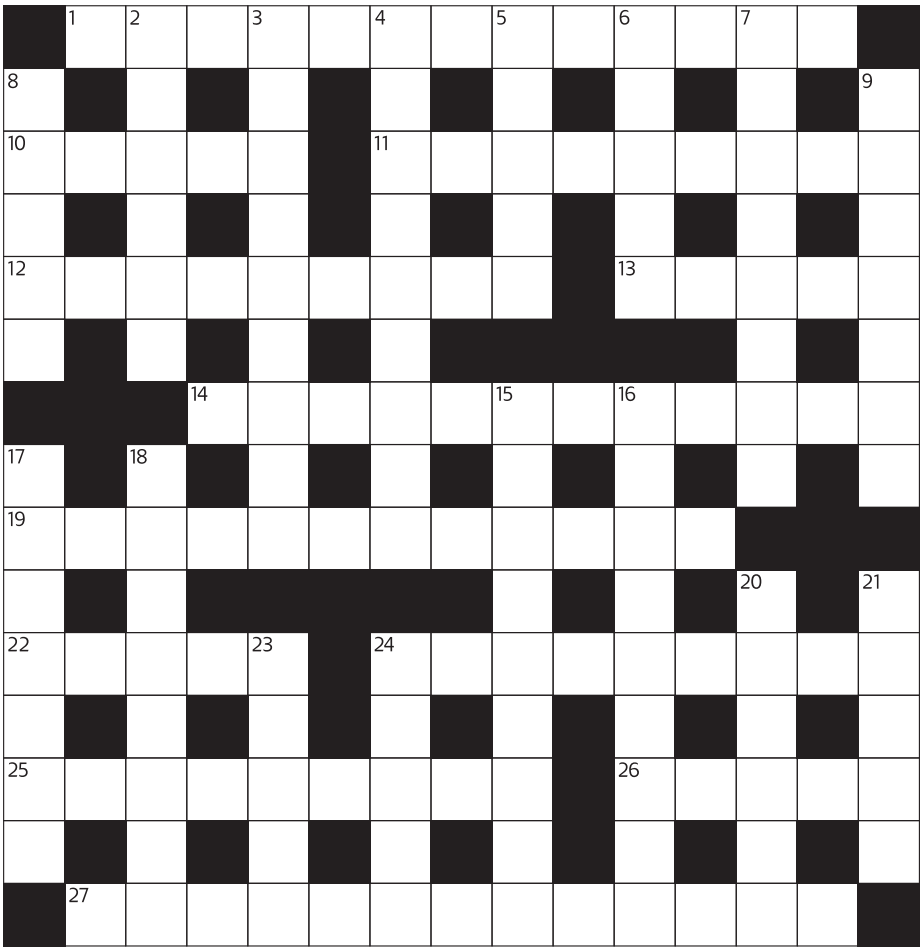

ACROSS

1 An athlete—or a DJ—might, but don't let go the minutes! (4,3,6)

10 Apply your headgear again, or just tell it all another time? (5)

11 Proving oral vying is a bad way to create a grand conceit! (9)

12 Doing this with Dixie is fiddling around with a slight win, perhaps. (9)

13 Obviously, what one does alone to a point—a wise and experienced one. (5)

14 You and I might be if we argue over these answers, but the symbol of the brand goes to Pa's partner if the chits are bad! (12)

19 Is it an instrument of morality or merely less than a grand, as they say? (7,5)

22 The support is not out of what the scarecrow lacked! (5)

24 Sounds like a small underground city creature, but it keeps to the beat! (9)

25 The remainder before the train wreck shows a bit of control. (9)

26 Is a little state getting a negative answer in France, or is it just a significant collection? (5)

27 Implying your worst is downhill—or up? This is a person's all! (4,5,4)

DOWN

2 A flower has unusual shapes alternatively, a number disappeared. (6)

3 A choppy pond and a lame thigh combined to make two sound like one on your tongue. (9)

4 You might do this with an appendix or with an enemy. (4,2,3)

5 If you ruin game, obviously, you'll be feeling remorse. (5)

6 Gets something for nothing but loses 500 to get pens. (5)

7 If this, do you cheer not quite as often or are you more like a rolling stone? (8)

8 One might be all this and no 22, but, *nota bene*, it's about a large conflict, all rising. (5)

9 My angst is disturbed about the very flexible. (7)

15 Ancient intellectual, realist, too, possibly, taking nothing away. (9)

16 Sounds like a good-looking mode of transportation, but it's an old set of wheels for hire. (6,3)

17 Anesthetics or symbols of quantity? (7)

18 Friend of Crick, or Holmes? (2,6)

20 Jumps around the queen to become cads and rotters! (6)

21 This way to the end! (5)

23 Neither short manuscript meets standards of regularity. (5)

24 Pretty corny! (5)

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